SPORTS BETTING RUINED MY LIFE: A MEMOIR

Maitreyi Ramakrishnan, Canada's biggest Netflix star

THE CASE FOR LABELLING AI-CREATED ART

MACLEAN'S

The End of Homeownership

MANY YOUNG CANADIANS WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO BUY PROPERTY

How this new reality will transform
the way we live for generations to come

BY MICHELLE CYCA

VISIT…

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

Count on more with Rogers 5G.

We're making changes to give you more from your mobile experience – starting with more 5G plans to choose from, more data for your dollar, and more plans that fit your needs. And you can count on more value to come. Because we're with you all the way.

Get 5G mobile plans now as low as **$55**/mo. For 24 mos. and after Automatic Payments Discount.

Visit Rogers.com/plans to discover our 5G mobile plans.

Eligible customers only.

ROGERS With you all the way

MACLEAN'S

July 2023 · Volume 136 · Number 5

26
Sarah Peacock and her family moved back to Halifax in 2021, hoping to buy a house and settle down. They now live with Sarah's mother.

7
THE INTERVIEW
Netflix star Maitreyi Ramakrishnan is an it girl. Just don't call her that.

18
THE BIG IDEA
Generative AI is already leaking into the media. The next step: labelling it.

20
DAYCARE DIARIES
One woman's frenzied search for affordable childcare upended her personal and professional life

COVER STORY

26
The End of Homeownership
What happens to a country when its young people can't buy houses?

BY MICHELLE CYCA

22
THE PROSPECT
Laeticia Amihere is towering over the WNBA

24
THE BUILDING
Montreal's new Formula One paddock was built in a flash

24
Montreal's F1 circuit

Cover photo illustration by *Maclean's*; photographs by iStock

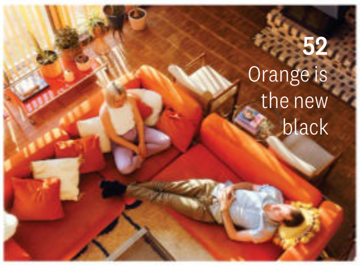
MACLEAN'S July 2023

36
Noah Vineberg,
recovering
gambling addict

FEATURES

36
Risking It All
I placed my first wager when I was 10, and I've gambled more than $1 million since. Ubiquitous sports betting ads make my recovery much harder.
BY NOAH VINEBERG

44
The Murder of Ashley Wadsworth
A teenager from B.C. was killed by her boyfriend. Police knew he was dangerous. Why didn't they tell her?
BY CARLY LEWIS



52
Orange is
the new
black

52
HABITAT
A couple preserve a 1970s fever-dream bungalow in Quebec

56
FIRST PERSON
How a peculiar burger franchise helped Lebanese immigrants put down roots in Alberta

66
PHOTO ESSAY
A new book traces the deep relationship between East Coasters and their land

72
Quebec
City's
Alexander
McQueen
exhibit

72
CULTURE
What to see, hear, read and watch this month

74
MY ARRIVAL
A Japanese immigrant finds that things are different for women in Canada

EDITOR'S NOTE

IN THIS ISSUE OF MACLEAN'S

I bought my modest semi-detached house in a central Toronto neighbourhood in 2008. My husband and I had moved back to Canada with our toddler son after a year living in Brooklyn, New York, and we spent most of 2007 looking for a property to buy. Prices were skyrocketing—at least by the standards of the day—and we had trouble finding anything we could afford. Over many months we lost out on several bidding wars and fell in love with houses far outside our budget.

Then the market crashed. It was the beginning of the Great Recession, and homeowners panicked. We found a listing for a three-bedroom in a leafy neighbourhood near a good public school. The couple who had lived in it for 29 years believed Canada was heading toward economic armageddon and quickly put it on the market. The financial downturn provided us with a window of opportunity. We put in an offer and won.

For years after we moved into our house, I coached friends who were house hunting: just wait for a dip in the market, like we did. Markets are cyclical. The country's crazy house prices can't last forever. What goes up, must come down. Right? Well, I don't give that advice anymore. Fifteen years later, the market has defied all odds and climbed steadily upward, making a mockery of everyone who, like me, predicted the bubble would pop.

How did we get here? *Maclean's* asked the Vancouver writer Michelle Cyca to find out. Her story, on page 26, is a sobering analysis of Canada's housing crisis and a generational *cri de coeur*. She depicts a massive, widening gulf between the property-owning class of Canadians and everyone else. Most chillingly, she laments the fact that homeownership has become an option almost exclusively for inheritors of wealth. She reports that, given the cost of living now, most working Canadians would have to save for nearly 30 years for a down payment in Toronto or Vancouver.

> "The cover story depicts a massive gulf between the property-owning class of Canadians and everyone else"

One clever millennial TikToker captured the despair of his peers in a painfully funny series about the cost of Canadian homes where he compares real estate listings of ordinary houses with "literal European castles." He jokingly tells his audience that they could either buy an unremarkable three-bedroom in Kitchener, Ontario, say, or a massive restored castle in Belgium. Canadians have become so accustomed to multi-million-dollar price tags on real estate listings, we forget that such prices are not normal.

There's a reason Pierre Poilievre has made the cost of living, and house prices in particular, a regular talking point. He's cunningly tapping into the frustration of 20-somethings and 30-somethings—across political party lines—who have been raised on the Canadian dream but have come to the sad conclusion that they won't ever own a home. Never mind that the federal government can only do so much to improve the housing situation. As Michelle Cyca describes in her remarkable cover story, it's the big subject of her generation, and there's no solution in sight.

SARAH FULFORD
Editor-in-chief, *Maclean's*

Hair and makeup by Alanna Fennell/Plutino Group

PHOTOGRAPH BY **ERIN LEYDON**

SIGN UP FOR OUR FREE NEWSLETTER TO GET ALL THE MAGAZINE'S TOP STORIES SENT DIRECTLY TO YOUR INBOX: **MACLEANS.CA/**NEWSLETTER

Add us to your winter reading. Subscribe to *Toronto Life*

MACLEAN'S

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Sarah Fulford
EXECUTIVE EDITOR Emily Landau
ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR Katie Underwood
SENIOR EDITORS Mary Dwyer (University Rankings), Matthew Halliday (Features), Mark Pupo (Special Projects)
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Stephanie Bai

DIRECTOR, PRODUCTION AND TECHNOLOGY Jacob Sheen
DIGITAL EDITOR Mariyam Khaja
AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT EDITOR Arisa Valyear
DIGITAL INTERN Prarthana Pathak

CREATIVE DIRECTOR Christine Dewairy
ART DIRECTOR Anna Minzhulina
DESIGNER Lauren Cattermole
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Rachel Wine
PHOTO EDITOR Kahlil Hernandez

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Liza Agrba, Michelle Cyca, Christina Frangou, Brian D. Johnson, Adnan R. Khan, Carly Lewis, Michael Lista, Stephen Maher, Jason McBride, Lauren McKeon, Omar Mouallem, Chris Nuttall-Smith, Sarah Treleaven, Andrea Yu

CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS Rodolphe Beaulieu, Antony Hare, Selman Hoşgör, Wade Hudson, Victor Kerlow, Evaan Kheraj, Vishal Marapon, Grady Mitchell, Ebti Nabag, Louise Pomeroy, Melissa Renwick, Pete Ryan, Allison Seto, Lauren Tamaki, William Ukoh

PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION MANAGER Joycelyn Tran
DIGITAL COLOUR SPECIALIST Drew Maynard

ADVERTISING

SALES MANAGER Lori Colucci

ST. JOSEPH COMMUNICATIONS

CHAIRMAN AND CEO Tony Gagliano
VICE-CHAIRMAN John Gagliano

SENIOR VICE-PRESIDENT, CONTENT AND CREATIVE Maryam Sanati
EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT, ENTERPRISE OPERATIONS David McGrath
EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT, SALES Ray D'Antonio
EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT, SOCIAL & EMERGING PLATFORMS Jacqueline Loch
VICE-PRESIDENT, MARKETING AND BRANDED CONTENT Sasha Emmons
VICE-PRESIDENT, DIGITAL SOLUTIONS AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT Jason Maghanoy
VICE-PRESIDENT, PRINT OPERATION Maria Mendes
VICE-PRESIDENT, CLIENT SOLUTIONS Cameron Williamson
GENERAL MANAGER, AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT AND COMMERCE Michael Gagliano

HOW TO REACH US

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
letters@macleans.ca
(Provide your name, address and phone number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.)

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUBSCRIPTIONS
service@macleans.ca
macleans.ca/service
Maclean's Customer Service, 15 Benton Road, Toronto, Ont., M6M 3G2

TO ORDER BACK ISSUES
canadianmags.ca
Full subscription price for one year is $39.99 plus applicable taxes;
U.S.A., $60 surface; all other countries, $100 airmail.

ADVERTISING
lori.colucci@stjoseph.com

Contents copyright © 2023 by St. Joseph Communications, may not be reprinted without permission.
Maclean's, 15 Benton Road, Toronto, Ontario, M6M 3G2
Maclean's ISSN 0024-9262. Publications Mail Agreement No. 42494512.
We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada.
Printed in Canada by St. Joseph Communications, Print.

Canada
Alliance for Audited Media
vividata

SJC

Makeup by Julia Vuong; hair by Priya Kumari Bilkhu

Never Have I Ever star **Maitreyi Ramakrishnan** is doing it for the vibes

INTERVIEW BY **KATIE UNDERWOOD** • PHOTOGRAPHY BY **WADE HUDSON**

IF YOU BELIEVE the early hype, Maitreyi Ramakrishnan rolled off her parents' couch in Mississauga, Ontario, and into a star-making lead role in Netflix's hit high school rom-dram *Never Have I Ever*. It was 2019, and a friend sent the tweet announcing Mindy Kaling's casting call. Ramakrishnan, then 17 and tired from a long day at real-life Meadowvale Secondary School, went, so it goes: *Eh, why not?*

In truth, Ramakrishnan, now 21, has always had big plans. Okay, maybe "preferred manifestations." She hadn't banked on besting 15,000 other young girls to play the now-iconic teenage try-hard Devi Vishwakumar. Acting wasn't her first dream; she wanted to be an animator. Later, she was cast as Priya Mangal, an (animated) South Asian tween, in Pixar's *Turning Red*. Things have a funny way of working out—just rarely in the way she imagines.

The final season of *Never Have I Ever*, set in Devi's senior year, streams this month. Another freshly adult actor who's had less success with serendipity might dread an open schedule, but Ramakrishnan is mostly relaxed. What's the next big thing for the erstwhile "next big thing"? A university degree? A stint as a Disney princess? She'll figure it out—or the universe will.

Devi's finally graduating. In a way, you're graduating, too. Congrats! Where's your head at as the series winds down? Reflective? Sad? On to the next?
A mix—sad, excited for the unknown. It ended when it needed to. I hate when shows drag out. That's a pet peeve of mine.

The good thing about the high school conceit is that it can really only last four years—unless you "fail."
Right? In real life, I started high school in 2015. Then the show went from 2019 to 2023. I've been in high school for eight years. I failed every year, basically. Oh my god.

Was it surreal to attend fake high school right after attending one for real?
It was. In season one, I was so excited to see what a real set was like because I'd never worked on one. I looked at everything like, "This isn't a real door! It's all fake!" But, very quickly, it became my stomping ground, that little hallway that we re-dressed in a million different ways. You'd never know!

Speaking of transformations, you had one of the more dramatic pandemic glow-ups. *Never Have I Ever* debuted a month after we went into lockdown, and you came out of it an it girl. So, you know, how was that?
I don't know about an *it* girl. I definitely came out wiser than I went in. For most of lockdown, I was filming. During months off, I played video games with my family and finally learned how to do transitions on TikTok. I had that phase of "Maybe I can start working out!" then slowly realizing, "No, I can't start working out."

> **“To me, being an it girl is people getting hyped about the things you’ve been the whole time—they’re just noticing them in that specific moment”**

So you were living with your parents?
I mean, I *still* live with my parents.

I’m well aware that Mississauga and Hollywood are two very different worlds…
What?! The Meadowvale Town Centre *isn’t* the Walk of Fame?

…but what do you do when you’re home?
I still do press, take meetings and audition. (After the pandemic, everything is self-tapes.) I also do fun, spontaneous things like visit Toronto Comicon and fan expos. I dragged my best friend to paint pottery the other day. I picked a plate—easy, because it’s flat—and painted “I feel lucky” with charms around it. I think it’s gonna look good, but it might look like garbage, to be honest.

Your parents immigrated here from Sri Lanka before you were born. What do they think of all the Hollywood fuss? How do you even begin to broach something like that?
They’re supportive and protective in all the right ways. They understand the *Hannah Montana* switch I do because they’re right beside me. They also keep me humble. I’m very much like, “I can walk into Square One, no problem!” And they’re like, “Just stay low-key. Don’t be an idiot.” It’s a really hard thing to wrap your head around, living a regular suburban life and having people say, “You’re famous!” I’m kind of a turd, actually.

I apologize for using the term it girl earlier. I know it’s a bit gross to admit you love fame, but are there any parts that make you go, “Man, this is amazing”?
Being an it girl adds a shit-ton of pressure, mainly the pressure to stay one. To me, being an it girl is people getting hyped about the things you’ve been the whole time—they’re just noticing them in that specific moment. Every time a season of *Never Have I Ever* comes out, we’re “what’s hot on Netflix.” Then it fades. But we’re all so much more than being hot on the internet.

Okay, but I’m sure the thirst traps you post are better with a glam squad and some art direction behind you, right?
Thirst traps are fun, I can’t even lie. For red-carpet events, I have a photographer—with *lighting*. I never thought I’d be this person. I was lounging in the fetal position 10 minutes later, but a shot my cousin took of me on vacation is actually one of my most-liked photos. I hope people know how much went into that perfect pose. My toes aren’t even in it! I’m not gonna let the internet see those for free.

On the topic of image versus reality: when you play such an iconic character right out of the gate, you run the risk of fusing with them in people’s minds. What do you want everyone to know about you in your own right? Go ahead—set the record straight.
At one point, I hated Devi for that very reason: people just think I *am* her. I’m Devi in the same way everyone is. I make mistakes and feel a lot of emotions. I know I’m my own person. I want to play many different personalities in many genres, especially so I can prove—as a young brown woman—that I’m not just saying lines. I’m damn good at my job and I want audiences to watch me do it in 100 different ways.

So versatility is the name of the game for you?
One hundred per cent. Season one was definitely heavier on people thinking I was just Devi because, in all fairness, there wasn’t much out there about me at the time. I was like a one-year-old in my career.

A famous baby.
I’m still just a four-year-old, so please be nice! Unfortunately, audiences are never going to know who I really am. In fact, I realized no one in my life will know me the way I know me—except for maybe my dog. He sees me in my room, whether I’m having a dance party or a mental breakdown.

Maybe I can tell you what I *think* I know about you. There seems to be a perception that you’re pretty blunt. Even in *My Little Pony: Make Your Mark*—which is just voicework—you play the tough, no-nonsense pony.
I do.

People can also learn a lot about you from your Twitter, namely that your mom wanted to burn your old shoes, that you get motion sickness in cars and that, in addition to your spontaneous pottery, you once got a spontaneous tattoo. Are you not a planner by nature?
Whenever I do plan, I realize it’s kind of a waste of time. I love going on adventures with my friends. In the middle of the night, I’ll say, “Hey guys, let’s drive two hours away from here and see what’s happening. Let’s do it for the vibes!” I will say: I am driven, too. I’m a big dreamer.

Being plucked out of 15,000 young women at an open casting call, as you were, might make someone believe in destiny. Do you? Or is this all just a random free-for-all?
I’m a spiritual person. I believe in things like manifesting—you know, speaking things into the universe. I’m that girl who wishes on 11:11 every morning. I say all of my goals as quickly as possible in that

> **“Not all brown girls see themselves in Devi. Maybe they’re not fans of the show or my acting or my face—no hard feelings!”**

minute. I’m sure it does nothing at all, but it is mentally nice to be positive. Like, take Ke Huy Quan, this year’s Best Supporting Actor winner: he talks a lot about never letting go of your dreams. I agree with him.

Do you ever think you’re always manifesting things, but maybe not in the exact way you thought? Example: You wanted to be an animator when you were a kid. Then you were cast in Pixar’s *Turning Red*.
Yes. I can think of so many things like that. I watched *The Office* in high school and always said, “One day, I’m going to meet the cast members!” I haven’t met Steve Carell yet, but I’ve slowly started checking off some others: *the* Mindy Kaling, of course. Angela Kinsey played Ben’s mom in season one of *Never Have I Ever*. That was a freak-out moment for me.

Were there any notable non-*Office* manifestations?
In real high school, I came up with something called “Maitreyimas,” which is on December 28—my birthday. I would joke to my friends that one day it was going to be an international holiday. Now my fans tweet “Merry Maitreyimas” to each other from all around the world. Isn’t that cool?

Very. Can you speak something into existence for me?
What do you want? Some career stuff? Some good ol’ happiness stuff?

Well, my childhood dream was to be the Canadian Oprah—which is a lot like what I’m doing today, actually.
Okay, so it’s going fine already. Anyway: *Katie’s going to receive something super amazing and fulfilling. She has no idea what it is, but it’s going to happen.*

I appreciate you using your powers for good.
My mom always says it’s important to put good energy out there.

I’m now going to kill the vibe a little and ask about your anxieties.
I love anxiety. Woo!

***Never Have I Ever* was watched in 40 million households in its first month. Do you ever wonder whether lightning will strike twice?**
Oh, yeah. After season one came out, I was like: *Wait, what if this is it for me?* But then, I have other thoughts I hold on to. I don’t think a girl who is a flash in the pan makes the *Time* 100 Next list. I’m not even trying to toot my own horn, but: the cover. If that’s the case, people would want to see my face on screen, right? I also think about how much Mindy believes in me. I try to give myself flowers instead of waiting for others to give them to me.

There’s a certain line of conversation that tends to crop up around young, successful women of colour: *She’s the one representative for everyone, so she has to be perfect!* It’s nonsense, of course, but was that initial spotlight in any way empowering for you? Or was it just limiting?
In the beginning, I knew it was special to represent so many people. But it did turn into: *Why am I being asked this question when white people don’t get asked this?* Seventeen-year-old me was tweaking out about the fact that she had to stand for so many South Asian people.

Too much pressure.
And not all brown girls see themselves in Devi! Maybe they’re not fans of the show or my acting or my face—no hard feelings! Anyway, those representation questions don’t really bother me anymore. Someone has to answer them if we all want to move forward. That’s a privilege that I take very, very seriously.

When all is said and done, what’s your dream role? I heard it’s Rapunzel.
I’ve been on that agenda since, like, 2020. I have a sticky note on my vision board that just says: *Rapunzel*. I listen to the *Tangled* soundtrack once a week, so that, in the event that someone eventually asks me to sing the songs, I can be like, “Yeah, I got you.” I told my team and my agents to let everyone know.

Well, now we know it’s going to happen because you’ve said it.
I feel like this one’s gonna need me to say it a good couple hundred times. Honestly, there are so many books that I want to adapt for the screen. I even want to be on *Hot Ones*, that YouTube show where you eat spicy chicken. That’s a goal, and I’m gonna put it out there. That’s courage.

Years ago, you deferred acceptance to York University’s theatre program to shoot your show. Then you changed your degree program to human rights and equity studies. You just finished your first full year. Isn’t that funny—you’re back in school again.
I try to fit in as many courses as I can when work isn’t crazy. People ask me when I’m going to graduate and I don’t know. I have no plans to die soon. By the time I was 10, I knew exactly which high school courses I was going to take to get my college animation portfolio done. Now? Yeah, we don’t do that. ■

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

INSIDE: OUR 2023 UNIVERSITY RANKINGS
MACLEAN'S
WORLD CUP
SPECIAL EDITION
The Amazing Journey of
ALPHON
MY DAD'S SECRET CRIMINAL PAST: A MEMOIR
How physician assistants can help fix health care
THE CANADIAN CRYPTO KING WHO LOST BILLIONS
MACLEAN'S
Lies
An investigation into "Pretendian" scandals in academia
A Calgary schoolteacher's long legacy of abuse
GABOR MATÉ ON THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION
Secrets unearthed from the Leonard Cohen archives
MACLEAN'S
INSIDE CANADA'S URGENT-CARE CRISIS
"Our emergency room is decimated and our staff is destroyed"
ALAN DRUMMOND
SAVE 67%

Unforgettable stories by the country's best writers

Subscribe to *Maclean's*

macleans.ca/save

MACLEAN'S
Canada's national magazine

A SPECIAL INTEREST SECTION BY MEDIAPLANET

Advancing Canada's Life Sciences Industry

READ MORE ONLINE AT HEALTHINSIGHT.CA

Why Advancing IDEA Is Good for Canada's Life Sciences Sector

To enhance Canada's life sciences sector, embedding inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) is crucial for fostering innovation and attracting talent.

Life Sciences Ontario

Canada currently ranks among the top hubs in the world for health and biosciences. Our world-class universities and research hospitals have led to breakthrough discoveries and trained a highly educated workforce. Yet Canada is also experiencing a talent gap in the life sciences sector, particularly at the executive and managerial levels, and equity-deserving groups are underrepresented. To transform Canada's life sciences sector into a truly innovative and globally competitive hub, we must take steps to build a more inclusive and diverse life sciences sector.

A new report, "Status of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) in Canada's Life Sciences Sector," conducted by Shift Health and Life Sciences Ontario (LSO) and supported by adMare BioInnovations and Pfizer, identifies opportunities for Canadian life sciences organizations to embed inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) initiatives into workplace practices and culture. Recommendations from the report include using inclusive language in job postings, offering mentorship programs for employees, requiring IDEA training for all employees, and holding leaders accountable by embedding IDEA into organizational strategies.

Embedding IDEA initiatives

Life sciences companies in Canada are taking steps to embed IDEA into organizational practices and culture. LSO, in partnership with Shift Health, announced the "Building an Inclusive Life Sciences Future (BILSF)" initiative in June 2021, a series of community-driven engagements and workshops aimed at mobilizing the life sciences community around a powerful action plan for IDEA. Larger companies can also support small and medium-sized enterprises — who may lack time and resources — in implementing IDEA initiatives.

By advancing IDEA, Canadian life sciences organizations can create a sense of community and belonging in the workplace. In doing so, life sciences organizations will be able to attract more talent and improve organizational performance, leading to greater innovation and an overall more globally competitive sector. ■

To learn more, visit **lifesciences ontario.ca**.

Strategic Account Managers: **Anna Sibiga, Meredith Burt, Sierra Nardella** Strategic Account Director: **Jessica Golyatov** Content Strategist: **Nicole Kansakar** Country Manager: **Nina Theodorlis** Production Lead: **Michael Taylor** Creative Lead: **Kylie Armishaw** Web Editor: **Christina Morgan** Digital Media Coordinator: **Kristen Neals** Digital Traffic Strategist: **Karm Rathod** All images are from Getty Images unless otherwise credited. This section was created by Mediaplanet and did not involve Maclean's Magazine or its editorial departments. Send all inquiries to **ca.editorial@mediaplanet.com**.

Cell and Gene Therapy — Canada's Chance To Be a Global Leader in Life Sciences

Canada is well on the way to becoming a global leader in the commercialization, investment, and manufacturing of cell and gene therapies.

Stacey Johnson, Vice President Communications and Marketing, CCRM

Canada's scientific community has a rich legacy of success. Those of us in the regenerative medicine field are especially proud of Drs. James Till and Ernest McCulloch, whose discovery of the stem cell in the 1960s was the foundation for the flourishing cell and gene therapy industry that exists today.

Cell and gene therapies have the promise to cure — not just treat — cancers, heart disease, diabetes, and more. Already in Canada, products have been approved in these disease areas: mantle cell lymphoma (2021); multiple myeloma (2021); spinal muscular atrophy (2020); inherited vision loss (2020); blood cancers (2019, 2018); and graft-versus-host disease (2012). This is exciting news for Canadian patients.

With more than 2,000 clinical trials, globally, testing the safety and efficacy of these treatments, there's huge demand on biomanufacturing companies to produce these advanced therapies.

For Canada to be a leader in this remarkable industry and able to manufacture these treatments domestically, we need specialized infrastructure, a skilled workforce, and specially trained technicians who can produce the products under very stringent and regulated conditions.

Toronto-based CCRM and its Hamilton-based subsidiary, OmniaBio Inc., are ensuring Canada won't be left behind. In fact, they want Canada to be a global hub for cell and gene therapy commercialization, investment, and manufacturing.

Included in CCRM's plans are building out international partnerships to accelerate the growth of the global industry and maintain Canada's leadership. With CCRM Australia several years along and the recent announcement of CCRM Nordic, the future is looking bright for patients in Canada and around the world. ■

Technicians working in a clean room at CCRM in Toronto.

To learn more, visit **ccrm.ca** and **omniabio.com**.

This article was **sponsored by CCRM**.

How McMaster Innovation Park Is Advancing Cell and Gene Therapy

McMaster Innovation Park is fostering an innovation ecosystem for life sciences and biotech researchers, entrepreneurs, and ventures.

The cell and gene therapy (CGT) sector in Ontario is rapidly gaining momentum with the transformative potential of CGT for healthcare and medicine and McMaster Innovation Park (MIP), the pulse of Hamilton's life sciences ecosystem, is accelerating the growth of life sciences and biomanufacturing ventures through purpose-built space and venture support.

"Every innovator, researcher, entrepreneur, and venture has slightly different requirements depending on their background and where they are in their journey," says Ty J. Shattuck, Chief Executive Officer of MIP. "There's no one-size-fits-all solution. We're that one door that they can knock on to get whatever they need for whatever stage of growth they're in."

The research park's focus on building a CGT cluster is a testament to its commitment to partnerships and collaborations. By leveraging the strong relationships it shares with neighbouring academic institutions McMaster University and Mohawk College, world-class healthcare facilities, and renowned life sciences and biomanufacturing companies like Fusion Pharmaceuticals that already reside at the park, MIP is building a community for business success.

"MIP is more than a business park," says Scott Rasmussen, Vice-President of Leasing and Business Development at MIP. "We are building a world-class CGT cluster in Hamilton, that will be comparable to similar clusters in Philadelphia, Boston, and Stevenage in the UK. This is becoming a reality for the park. We recently signed a lease with OmniaBio Inc. and are midway with the construction of its 90,000-square-foot cell and gene therapy CDMO."

On completion, OmniaBio Inc. will anchor the CGT cluster in Hamilton along with Triumvira Immunologics which already resides at the park. The communities will benefit from the region's strong supply chain and logistic amenities that have supported business growth for decades. ■

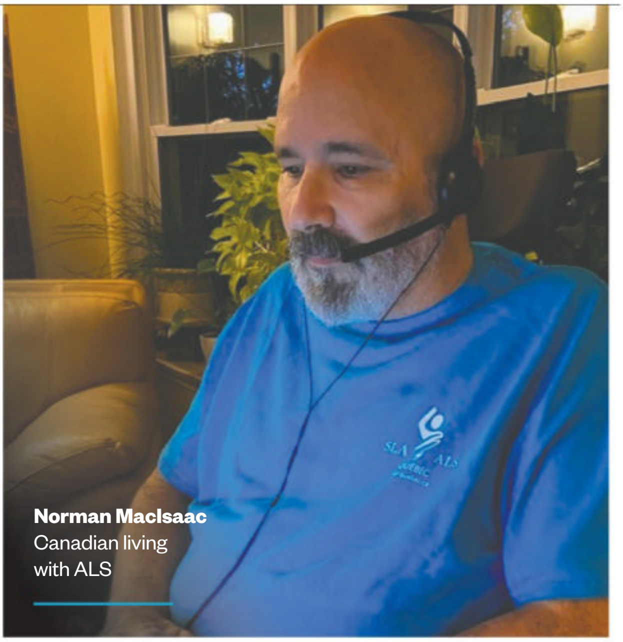
Learn more about collaborative opportunities at MIP by visiting **mcmasterinnovationpark.ca**.

This article was **sponsored by McMaster Innovation Park**.

Amylyx Pharmaceuticals Puts Canadians Living with ALS First

Reflections on progress and urgency from a 'made in Canada' biotech focused on progressive neurodegenerative diseases.

Tania Amardeil



Norman MacIsaac
Canadian living with ALS

Time is the enemy of people living with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease. ALS is a relentlessly progressive neurodegenerative disease caused by motor neuron death in the brain and spinal cord. A diagnosis quickly leads to deteriorating muscle function as the disease takes away a person's ability to walk, speak, eat, and breathe. ALS is fatal and the most common cause of neurological death in Canada. And despite this disease's rapid progression (the average life expectancy from symptom onset is two to five years), innovation in ALS has historically been slow and riddled with failures.

That's kept Amylyx Pharmaceuticals co-founders and co-CEOs, Josh Cohen and Justin Klee, up at night since the company's early days a little over 10 years ago, when the two were undergrad students poring over neurology papers and following their curiosity about why neurons die. Fast forward to one year ago, when Amylyx received its first drug approval in Canada for the treatment of ALS, before any other country in the world.

"Canada-first" milestones

Amylyx' ultimate mission is to one day end the suffering caused by neurodegenerative diseases. The company has been making strides to address the unmet needs for people living with ALS. And Canadians have played a key role in the Amylyx story.

"We've had strong support from the Canadian ALS community, who fiercely advocate for expedited review of, and access to, treatments for ALS," said Chris Aiello, General Manager and Head of Canada at Amylyx. One Canadian living with ALS, Norman MacIsaac, initiated a petition with over 25,000 signatures calling for streamlined access to Health Canada-approved ALS treatments. The House of Commons tabled the petition in early 2021, which helped bring Amylyx to Canada.

"For Canadians like me who live with ALS, treatment advancements now and on the horizon offer hope," said Norman. "Health Canada approval is a first step, but for people who rely on public reimbursement to access treatment, it's essential to accelerate and streamline the processes governing public coverage decisions so that Canadians who need the medication can access it before it's too late."

> **"For Canadians like me who live with ALS, treatment advancements now and on the horizon offer hope.**

"The approximately 3,000 Canadians living with ALS and their loved ones are on a different clock, so we continue to work with urgency in our pursuit of creating more moments for this community," added Justin. Unlike many pharmaceutical companies that manufacture offshore, Amylyx established manufacturing for its medicine at a facility in Ontario, which not only supplies product for Canada, but also the world.

The approval wasn't the only "Canada-first" milestone for Amylyx, and it won't be its last. As part of its commitment to helping those living with progressive neurological diseases, Amylyx continues to invest in ways to advance research in Canada.

In partnership with the Canadian Neuromuscular Disease Registry at the University of Calgary, Amylyx established its first global real-world evidence development initiative to gain important insights on its treatment for ALS. Amylyx recently invested in a two-year research agreement with the Sunnybrook Research Institute in Toronto, which will help expedite the identification of future novel drugs to treat neurodegenerative diseases.

"With ALS being the relentless disease that it is, we too have to be relentless in researching therapeutic options that may stop disease progression, as well as continuing to work for equitable access to novel therapies," Josh explained.

No time to wait

Amylyx' top priority today is to ensure all eligible Canadians living with ALS can access treatment. The company has been in ongoing negotiations with government decision-makers who they hope will provide timely, equitable access to treatment for those who are eligible, no matter where they live in the country.

With June being ALS Awareness Month in Canada, there's no better time to shine a light on these important issues. ■

Josh Cohen
Co-Founder & Co-CEO, Amylyx Pharmaceuticals

Justin Klee
Co-Founder & Co-CEO, Amylyx Pharmaceuticals

Chris Aiello
General Manager & Head of Canada, Amylyx Pharmaceuticals

Learn more at **amylyx.ca**.

This article was **sponsored by Amylyx Pharmaceuticals**.

Celebrating 10 Years of AbbVie Leadership

AbbVie celebrating 10 years of making a remarkable impact.

Tania Amardeil

AbbVie's 10th anniversary marks an important milestone. In Canada, over the past decade, the independent biopharmaceutical company has gone from ranking #14 to #3, launching 44 new medications or indications and more than doubling its employee base (now totalling more than 1,100 professionals). In the past three years, AbbVie Canada has also created more than 200 new jobs.

Investing in Canada's life sciences sector

"Since 2013, we've been focused on investing in our people, building our capabilities, expanding our innovative pipeline, and diversifying our portfolio," says Tracey Ramsay, Vice-President and General Manager of AbbVie Canada.

AbbVie's mission is to discover and deliver innovative medicines and solutions that address complex health issues and enhance people's lives. The company is driven by its compassion for people, commitment to innovation and inclusion, service to the community, and uncompromising integrity.

"We have a very robust early and late-stage pipeline," says Ramsay. "We're focused on unmet medical needs in our core areas — immunology, neuroscience, oncology, and eye care."

Thanks to its dedication to innovation and research and development, AbbVie Canada will be launching 21 new medications or indications by the end of 2023.

Ensuring access to innovative medicines is also a priority for AbbVie Canada. "We believe patients deserve access to innovative therapies," says Ramsay. "We need to find sustainable ways to balance our investment in research, our collective ability to provide access to these medications, and the cost of medications."

As a leader in Canada's life sciences sector, AbbVie is making a real difference in people's lives. ■

Learn more about AbbVie's leadership in the space at **abbvie.ca**, **@abbviecanada**.

This article was made possible with support from AbbVie Canada.

Solving the tough challenges so we can raise the standard of treatment for everyone

ECONOMIC IMPACT

1,100+ Canadian employees

200 jobs created since 2020

INNOVATIVE MEDICINES

44 new medicines and indications launched in Canada from 2013-2023

21 new medications and indications expected to launch in Canada by end of 2023

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (R&D)

94 active clinical trials

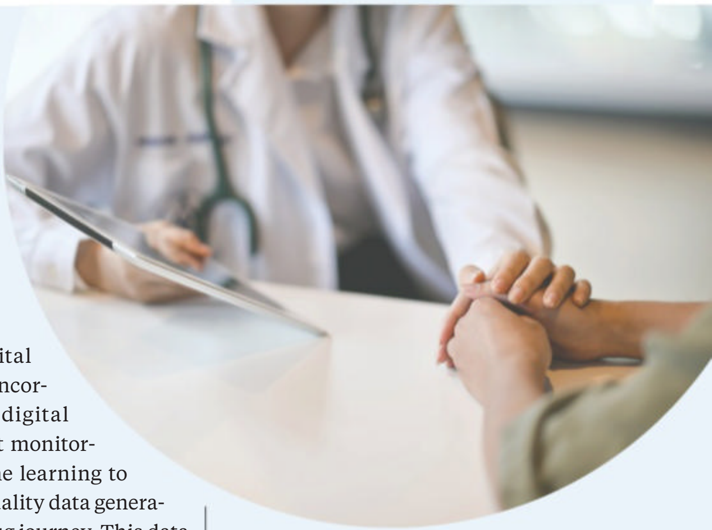
543+ Canadian trial sites

3,816+ Canadian patients supporting active clinical trials

Improving Canadian Rare Disease Patients' Access to Treatment

Bayshore Specialty Rx is on a mission to help rare disease patients across Canada gain access to the treatments they need.

Sean McBride, National Director Commercial Operations



For individuals with a rare disease, timely access to treatments can be life-changing and often life-saving. One challenge Canada is facing is the inability to accurately track and allocate health care resources to rare disease communities. A concerted effort must be placed on data collection methods to monitor clinical and economic outcomes along patient-drug journeys to provide key insights for better health care delivery.

Bayshore Specialty Rx is committed to partnering with industry, community, and medical stakeholders to provide access to innovative therapies through clinical trial support and patient support programs (PSPs). These services are designed to reduce the barriers imposed on patients by increasing access to therapeutic options and to provide navigational support of complex medical and reimbursement systems. The application of innovative digital technologies integrated with PSP services can help transform health care delivery to rare disease communities.

Embracing the power of digital

Bayshore is at the digital technology forefront by incorporating customized digital platforms, remote patient monitoring, surveys, and machine learning to PSPs, allowing for high-quality data generation across the patient-drug journey. This data can help forecast and provide recommendations on health, safety, and economic resource utilization outcomes in the real world through advanced analytics. Health Canada and health technology agencies involved in assessing the clinical benefit and cost of drugs are increasingly looking to real-world evidence to inform them of the true benefit of various therapies. Real-world data is particularly valuable for rare disease products as clinical trials are often supported with a small sample size over shorter trial periods and may not have appropriately sized comparative groups. The rich ecosystem of data captured within Bayshore PSPs can help stakeholders in supporting medical, regulatory, and reimbursement decision-making processes. Key data insights from PSPs can help support access to life-changing therapies for rare disease communities. ■

To learn more, visit **bayshore.ca/BSRx**.

This article was **sponsored by Bayshore Speciality Rx**.

Bayshore Specialty Rx

Novartis Invests in the Montréal Health Innovation District to Foster a New Wave of Healthcare Partnerships

The launch of Novartis' new Montréal head office heralds a renewed commitment to collaboration and innovation within Canada.

Tania Amardeil

Novartis Canada is on a mission to reimagine medicine to improve and extend the lives of millions of patients across the country. Using innovative science and technology, the life sciences leader is striving to give renewed hope for patients with unmet medical issues by discovering and developing breakthrough treatments and exploring new ways to deliver them to patients.

Novartis' commitment to innovation goes hand in hand with its dedication to collaboration within Canadian healthcare. The launch of its new Montréal office underscores this commitment to building new and groundbreaking partnerships with stakeholders across the healthcare landscape.

The power of collaboration

Novartis Canada's new office is located within the iconic Place Gare Viger and places the company in the heart of the Montréal's Health Innovation District, a flourishing ecosystem of healthcare stakeholders and organizations dedicated to the creation and exchange of innovative ideas, and includes a hospital, university, government stakeholders, and many startup technology companies.

"We are thrilled to be part of this progressive and invigorating district of Montréal as we continue to reimagine medicine," says Andrea Marazzi, Country President of Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada. "Our new head office puts us closer to our stakeholders and has been developed to facilitate true collaboration and partnership. It is through these collaborations that we can maximize our impact for patients in Canada, and this new site in Montréal is a symbol of our commitment to this approach. It will allow us to partner more closely with patients, healthcare and innovation partners, as we strive to deliver innovative new treatments in the future."

Cross-sector collaboration has been deeply embedded within Novartis' formula for future innovation and success. For example, within multiple sclerosis, it has partnered with Montréal-based Innodem Neurosciences to explore how biomarkers could provide clinicians with a more comprehensive and personalized approach to managing the disease, and lead to more proactive care for patients.

While, in Ontario, it's forging bold new public-private partnerships with cardiology groups to establish a network of secondary prevention, nurse practitioner enabled, traditional, and virtual clinics. These clinics are aiming to improve follow-up care, shorten wait times, and improve long-term outcomes and quality of life for cardiovascular disease patients.

This innovative approach to partnerships, the company believes, will help it to develop and deliver improved health solutions that it would not achieve alone.

Ongoing investments within Canada

In 2023, Novartis has renewed its commitment and investment within Canada with the launch of two cutting-edge new offices. In addition to the new Montréal head office, which will support the company's 650 associates across Quebec, Novartis also opened a new office in the MaRS Discovery District of Toronto in February. With its investment into these two spaces, Novartis is strategically placed within two of North America's leading life science innovation hubs.

In addition, the company is investing $30 million each year into its research and development activities in Canada. Currently, Novartis is sponsoring more than 150 clinical trials in a number of therapeutic areas to identify potential future treatments.

With many patients continuing to live with persistent unmet medical issues, Novartis remains committed to the exploration, development and launch of innovative and groundbreaking treatments within serious and growing conditions such as cardiovascular diseases, breast, and prostate cancer.

"We are convinced that to address the most pressing needs of the patient community and the healthcare system, we must work together to design new and innovative ways of reimagining healthcare," stated Pasquale Frega, Novartis LACan Innovative Medicines President.

As the life science industry continues to evolve to more effectively tackle the persisting health issues in Canada, Novartis is pushing the boundaries of cross-sector collaboration to continue innovating for those that need it the most, as the company continues on its journey to Reimagine Medicine. ■

MLR ID: 285467

Andrea Marazzi
Country President, Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada

Visit **novartis.ca** to learn more about Novartis.

This article was **sponsored by Novartis**.

How Ontario Is Leading the Way in the Medical Isotopes Field

Ontario-based Laurentis Energy Partners is an innovative leader and producer of medical isotopes, which are transforming global health care.

Tania Amardeil

Pictured is a healthcare professional analyzing medical diagnostics, which are powered by the isotopes produced in Ontario's CANDU nuclear reactors by Laurentis.

What do nuclear power and health care have in common? A lot, actually. Medical isotopes generated from Ontario's CANDU nuclear power plants help people in Canada and globally to enjoy a healthier and safer quality of life. Many stable and radioactive isotopes play an enormous role in medicine, medical imaging, medical device sterilization, new drug development, neutron research, border security, food preservation, and much more. And when it comes to technology advancements and the production of isotopes, Ontario is leading the way.

Understanding medical isotopes

"Life-saving medical isotopes from Ontario's nuclear power plants are used to diagnose or treat disease," says Jason Van Wart, President of Laurentis Energy Partners, a subsidiary of Ontario Power Generation (OPG). "By harnessing the energy released by these isotopes, Ontario has the capability to provide essential services such as cancer treatment, sterilization, and the diagnosis of diseases for the medical and industrial worlds."

Over the past decade, the demand for medical isotopes has grown exponentially, with exciting advances in the field.

"OPG's CANDU reactors offer unique advantages in producing these valuable life-saving isotopes. The ability to produce vast quantities of isotopes and the reliability of production provided by CANDU reactors cannot be found elsewhere," says Van Wart. "Laurentis, along with our partners, have invested heavily in developing industry-leading technology at the Darlington Nuclear Generating Station in Clarington, Ontario. Others have done this on a much smaller scale, but the irradiation capability now in-service at OPG's Darlington station is unparalleled. This work has made Ontario a world-leader in the production of medical isotopes, and we're excited to offer our sizeable production capabilities to the world's medical isotope manufacturers."

OPG has 10 CANDU nuclear power plants in Ontario, all with the potential capacity to produce isotopes for use in nuclear medicine. As a wholly owned commercial subsidiary of OPG, Laurentis Energy Partners has the demonstrated technology, skill, and know-how to plan and support other nuclear power operators in developing their medical isotope production.

"Nuclear medicine really requires two components to come together — the ability to make high-purity isotopes, which Laurentis does in conjunction with its various partners, and the ability to deliver those isotopes to the exact spots in the body where they're needed using a 'targeting vector,'" explains Van Wart. "The advancement of 'vectors' — which attach themselves to the desired target cells in the body — has dramatically improved the effectiveness of medical isotopes in treating diseases such as metastatic cancers. Because they work so well, there's huge demand for these life-saving isotopes."

Ontario is up for the challenge and is prepared to meet supply needs.

A world leader

Based in Canada and with operations in Europe, Laurentis is an innovator and leader in the production and capture of life saving isotopes, as well as the clean energy industry at large, offering expertise for nuclear power utilities in the areas of operations and maintenance, inspections, project management and engineering, and regulatory support.

"We've built meaningful relationships and partnerships, use custom-designed tools and systems, and are focused on the execution of our isotope projects, as demonstrated by our ability to bring Helium-3 to market rapidly," says Van Wart.

Helium-3 (He-3) is one of the isotopes that Laurentis currently produces, along with Molybdenum-99 (Mo-99). It also has plans to recycle Heavy Water (D2O) and produce other medical isotopes, pending regulatory approvals. Ontario's reactors are also currently producing Cobalt-60, Lutecium-177, and more.

Exploring isotopes' uses

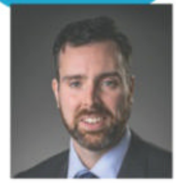
Ontario, through Laurentis, is the world's exclusive supplier of civilian-produced He-3.

As a stable (non-radioactive) and inert gas, high-purity He-3 is extracted from tritium stored at OPG's Darlington Station by Laurentis using a custom-designed tool.

"He-3 has industrial and medical applications including quantum computing, neutron research, border security, and medical imaging including the diagnosis of lung disorders," says Van Wart.

Mo-99 is a critical life-saving isotope that decays into Technetium-99m (Tc-99m), an essential physiological diagnostic imaging agent used in about 80 per cent of all nuclear medicine imaging scans for the diagnosis of heart disease, cancer, and other illnesses. Tc-99m has a global market demand of 40 to 50 million patients annually. Laurentis, in collaboration with BWXT Medical, received regulatory approval of the necessary license from the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission in November 2021, and will soon produce a stable domestic supply of Mo-99 from Darlington for use across North America.

Millions of people around the world benefit from medical isotopes, and Ontario is at the forefront of this technology, developing new manufacturing methods to create these rare isotopes and partnering with research organizations, universities, and health care providers to help save lives around the world. ■

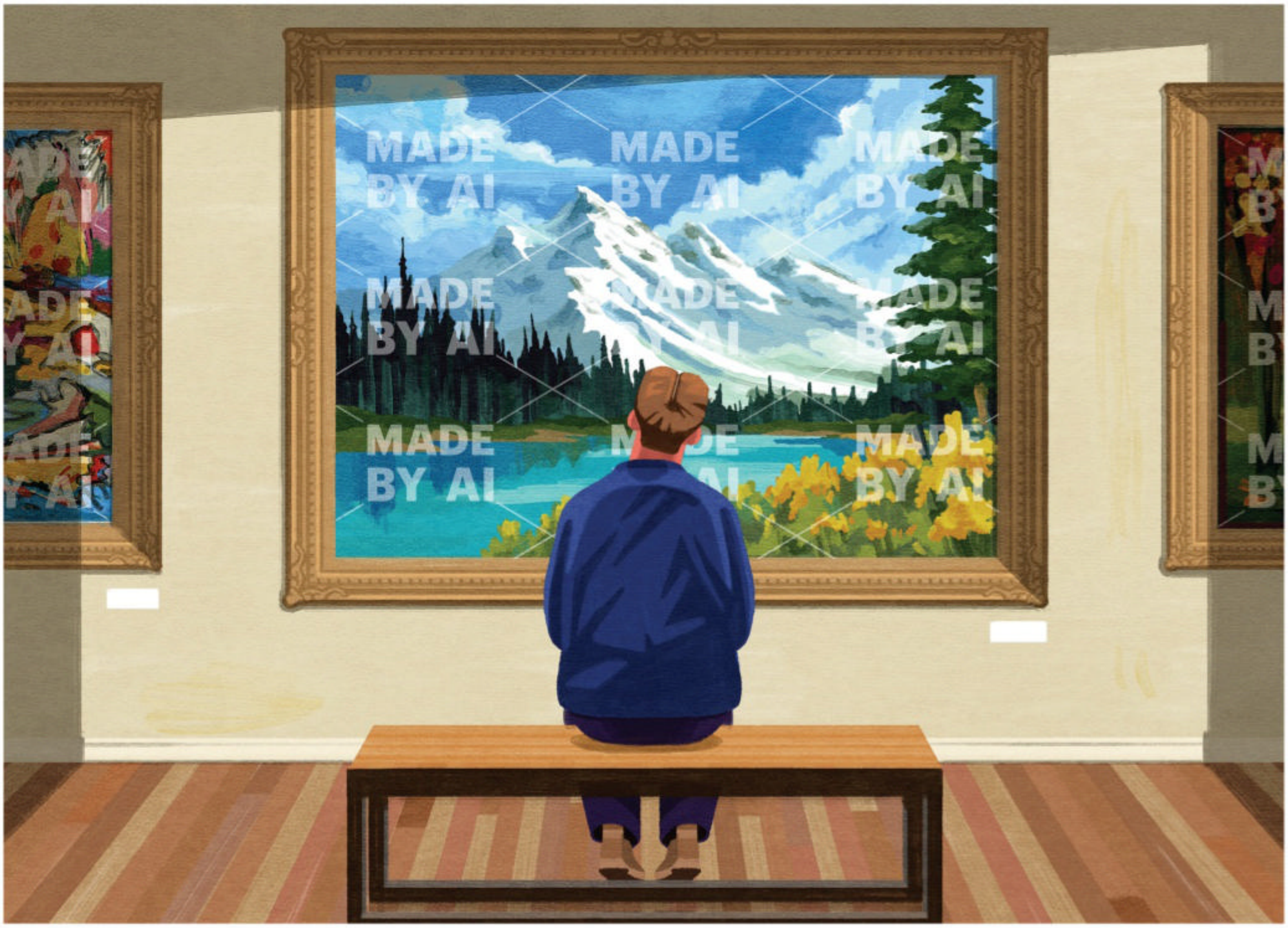


Jason Van Wart
President,
Laurentis
Energy Partners

Learn more at **laurentisenergy.com**.

This article was **sponsored by Laurentis Energy Partners**.

Laurentis Energy Partners



Label AI-Generated Content

Artificially intelligent tools are now able to create text, speech, art and video as well as humans can. We need to know who made what. ***By Valérie Pisano***

IT USED TO BE FAIRLY EASY to tell when a machine had a hand in creating something. Picture borders were visibly pixelated, the voice was slightly choppy or the whole thing just seemed robotic. OpenAI's rollout of ChatGPT last fall pushed us past a point of no return: artificially intelligent tools had mastered human language. Within weeks, the chatbot amassed 100 million users and spawned competitors like Google's Bard. All of a sudden, these applications are co-writing our emails, mimicking our speech and helping users create fake (but funny) photos. Soon, they will help Canadian workers in almost every sector summarize, organize and brainstorm. This tech doesn't just allow people to communicate with each other, either. It communicates with *us* and, sometimes, better than us. Just as criminals counterfeit money, it's now possible for generative AI tools to counterfeit people.

Mila, where I work, is a research institute that regularly convenes AI experts and specialists from different disciplines, particularly on the topic of governance. Even *we* didn't expect this innovation to reach our everyday lives this quickly. At the moment, most countries don't have any AI-focused regulations in place—no best practices for use and no clear penalties to prevent bad actors from using these tools to do harm. Lawmakers all over the world are scrambling. Earlier this year, ChatGPT was temporarily banned in Italy over privacy concerns. And China recently

ILLUSTRATION BY **PETE RYAN**

drafted regulations to mandate security assessments for any AI tool that generates text, images or code.

Here at home, scientists and corporate stakeholders have called for the federal government to expedite the Artificial Intelligence and Data Act, or AIDA, which was tabled by the Liberals in June of 2022. The Act, which is part of Bill C-27—a consumer privacy and data-protection law—includes guidelines for rollout of AI tools and fines for misuse. There's just one problem: AIDA may not be in force until 2025. Legislation usually doesn't move as fast as innovation. In this case, it needs to catch up quickly.

The European Union has taken the lead with its AI Act, the first AI-specific rules in the Western world, which it began drafting two years ago. Canada should consider adopting one of the EU's key measures as soon as possible: that developers and companies *must* disclose when they use or promote content made by AI. Any photos produced using the text-to-image generator DALL-E 2 could come with watermarks, while audio files could come with a disclaimer from a chatbot—whatever makes it immediately clear to anyone seeing, hearing or otherwise engaging with the content that it was made with an assist from machines. As an example, a professor we work with at Mila lets his students use ChatGPT to compile literature reviews at the start of their papers—provided they make note of which parts are bot-generated. They're also responsible for fact-checking the AI to make sure it didn't cite any non-existent (or completely wacko) sources.

The EU's AI Act includes a similar clause. Any company deploying generative AI tools like ChatGPT, in any capacity, will have to publish a summary of the copyrighted data used to train it. Say you're using a bank's financial planning service: in a properly labelled world, its bot would say, "I've looked at these specific sources. Based on that information, my program suggests three courses of action..." In the creative sector, artists have already filed copyright lawsuits alleging that their images have been lifted by bots. With mandatory labelling, it would be easier to run a check on what "inspired" those creations.

One of the main dangers of ChatGPT specifically is that it says incorrect things in such an authoritative way that it confuses us into thinking it's smarter than it is. (A tweet from Sam Altman, OpenAI's own CEO: "fun creative inspiration; great! reliance for factual queries; not such a good idea.") The tool was trained on a massive body of information including books, articles and Wikipedia, and recent upgrades have allowed it to access the internet. That gives it the impression of having a kind of super-intelligence. And though the program generates its responses almost instantly, it blurts them out one sentence at a time, with a human-like cadence. Even people with highly developed intuition could be fooled; ChatGPT is designed to make us trust it.

> **"Just as criminals counterfeit money, it is now possible for generative AI tools to counterfeit people"**

What it's *not* designed to do is find correct answers. ChatGPT isn't a search engine, whose algorithms prioritize more credible websites. It's common to ask generative AI questions and have it spit out errors or "hallucinations"—the tech term for the AI's confidently delivered mistakes. On a recent *60 Minutes* episode, James Manyika, a senior executive at Google, asked Bard to recommend books about inflation. Not one of its suggestions exists. If you type in "Valérie Pisano, AI, Montreal," ChatGPT won't offer a summary of my real bio, but an invented one. It's already so easy to create fake news. Generative AI tools will be able to supply infinite amounts of disinformation.

In the absence of any meaningful guardrails, we're having to rely on the judgment and good faith of regular internet users and businesses. This isn't enough. Canada can't leave oversight of this technology exclusively to the companies that are building it, which is essentially what happened with social media platforms like Facebook. (I'm no historian, but I recall that having some negative impacts on fair elections.) At some point, governments will either need to make it legal or illegal to pass off AI-generated content as human-created—at both the national and international levels.

We'll also need to agree on penalties. Not every misapplication of generative AI carries the same level of risk. Using the art generator Midjourney to make a fake picture of Pope Francis in a puffy winter coat isn't really a threat to anyone. That could easily be managed by a simple in-platform "report" button on Instagram. In areas like journalism and politics, however, using AI to mislead could be disastrous.

Labels also force a certain amount of AI literacy on the average person. We're past the point of being able to say, "But I'm not a tech-y person!" Going forward, all internet users are going to be encountering AI on a daily basis, not just reading articles about it. It will inevitably change how everyone creates, competes, works, learns, governs, cheats and chats. Seeing (or hearing) a "machine-made" disclaimer presents us with the opportunity to choose how we allow its output to permeate our personal lives.

Of all the new tools, chatbots seem to have impressed the scientific community the most—specifically, because of how human they feel. (I actually find it difficult not to say "please" and "thank you" when I'm interacting with them, even though I know a bot won't judge my manners.) So it's easy to imagine using generative AI for tasks that are more emotional. But while I might ask Google Chrome's new Compose AI extension to "write email requesting refund" to my airline, I probably wouldn't use it to pen notes to my close friends. I can also see the upsides of Snapchat's new My AI bot, which now greets millions of teens with a friendly "Hi, what's up?" while understanding that a machine will never replace the deeper kind of support we need to grieve a difficult loss. Some things might be better left to humans. I guess we'll see. ■

VALÉRIE PISANO *is the president and CEO of Mila, a non-profit artificial intelligence research institute based in Montreal.*

DAYCARE DIARIES

THE SEARCH FOR A SPOT

PHOTOGRAPH BY **KAMIL BIALOUS**

Having It All

I couldn't afford to stay home from work. Finding childcare for my son in B.C. cost me a lot more than money. ***By Theodora Jean***

IN 2015, MY HUSBAND and I moved from Ottawa to Vancouver, where he'd landed his dream job with the federal government. We loved the weather, the mountains and the ocean, and we could envision raising our future kids on the West Coast. I got a job at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, and a year after we moved, our first child was born.

I went on maternity leave for a year, and then I managed to get our son a spot at a home daycare. We paid $1,850 a month—it was expensive, but we made it work thanks to the savings we accumulated in Ottawa, where the cost of living was much cheaper. With my son taken care of, I was able to start working again.

In August of 2019, my husband was transferred to Squamish, a small town north of Vancouver. I was working remotely for the government—and doing some public-relations consulting on the side—so I didn't have to get a new job once we moved. We found a preschool for our then three-year-old son close to our new home, which cost us $1,150 a month. We were lucky: I heard from other preschool parents and through Facebook groups that there were long waitlists and few daycare spots in the area.

During the pandemic, my husband and I decided to have another baby. The day I got a positive pregnancy test, I requested a list of every daycare in Squamish from a local community services group. I received the names of 20 daycares, including home daycares and registered facilities. I put my second son—who I didn't even know was a son at the time—on every single waitlist he was eligible for. After I gave birth in March of 2021, I sent emails with his name and birth date to all the daycares I'd approached. We wanted to enrol him when he turned one so I could return to work. Every few months, I would ask for updates, but the daycares couldn't tell me when we'd get a spot. I even offered one facility $10,000 up front—a year's worth of fees—to secure a space. I was told they didn't have spots for kids his age.

I didn't end up going back to full-time work. My family couldn't afford to live in Squamish on one salary, so in March of 2022, I took an unpaid leave of absence and worked on growing my public-relations agency, Coldwater Communications. With a mortgage and two kids, it was definitely a financial risk, but I didn't have a choice. I scoured Facebook groups to find babysitters and part-time nannies.

> **"Another baby is completely off the table, in part because of the childcare crunch"**

For the next nine months, our childcare schedule was chaotic. One part-time nanny would watch my youngest at home for three hours in the morning. When she'd leave, I'd put him down for a nap, then squeeze in another hour or two of work. A second nanny would watch him for a while in the afternoon. When she couldn't come in, I'd walk him to a third nanny's house for a nap, set up his crib and pick him up at 4 p.m. We were spending roughly $1,200 a month on childcare at that point.

It was a lot to juggle: I had to pay three different caregivers and keep track of their changing schedules and sick days. If they needed time off, I had to find replacements. Hiring new help required extensive interviews and background checks, plus time-consuming onboarding. I couldn't plan personal events or meetings more than a few weeks in advance. Between naps, drop-offs and pick-ups, I could only work 20 hours a week.

In November of 2022, one of our part-time caregivers quit, and I had to scramble for a new one. We found a family living close by to share a nanny with. She comes to their house and watches both kids. We split her fees. I drop off my two-year-old at their house on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and he's there from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. On the other days, another caregiver watches him for three hours in the morning at my home. Since January, we've spent $2,200 a month on childcare alone. Aside from our mortgage, childcare is our biggest cost. We've had to pull from our retirement savings to pay for it.

There's relief in sight: in September, my youngest will begin full-time daycare at the same preschool his older brother attends. Our monthly fees for him will drop to $790, because of the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative—a B.C. government program that subsidizes childcare costs. If that hadn't happened, we might have had to move, and my husband likely would've lost his job. Having another baby is completely off the table, in part because of the childcare crunch.

Canadian parents have to either claw for a daycare spot or uproot their lives because they can't afford alternatives. These aren't viable solutions. While there's talk of building a nationally subsidized childcare system, I wonder if it will increase the number of daycare spots available. Affordable childcare is only useful if you can use it.

—As told to Adrienne Matei

EXTREME MEASURES Jean promised one Squamish daycare a year's worth of fees up front for a spot. They refused.

THE PROSPECT

YOUNG CANADIANS ABOUT TO BREAK BIG

POP QUIZ

Favourite sports flick: *The Game Plan*. "I was totally obsessed with Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson when I was growing up."

First concert: Maverick City Music, an American worship band

Most overused word: "I think it would probably be censored"

Can't-lose object: Her phone—and the 10,000 photos it stores

Career goal: "I'm pursuing a master's in sports management. Coaching is a possibility."

The Hoop Dreamer

Basketball wasn't ***Laeticia Amihere's*** *original game plan, but she was too good not to become a champion*

WHEN LAETICIA AMIHERE WAS A KID, complete strangers would stop her on the street to ask if she played basketball. The reason was obvious: she hit a healthy five-foot-seven before she hit Grade 6. In reality, Amihere preferred soccer and track, and when her older brothers shot hoops, she was relegated to water girl. Yet by 11, she was donning a Mississauga Monarchs jersey in her local house league. "I think I started playing just so I wouldn't have to have those conversations with strangers anymore," she says.

Amihere's skill was evident immediately. She was quite capable of charging the net, and her height made her a natural defender, meaning she could easily guard all five positions. Within four years, Amihere was playing provincial-level ball and, in 2017, she went viral as the first Canadian woman ever to dunk during gameplay at an Amateur Athletic Union tournament. When Canada's national team came calling, she was only 15.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **BRINSON + BANKS**
HAIR AND MAKEUP BY **KIMBERLY ACEVEDO**

Nearing graduation, Amihere had racked up 54 offers from colleges and universities across North America. She ultimately chose to attend the University of South Carolina for the chance to play for Gamecocks head coach Dawn Staley—a five-time WNBA all-star. At USC, Amihere had some big wins: she and four of her teammates were known as “The Freshies,” an uber-talented five-pack who, together, only lost nine games in four years. Staley has said Amihere is the most determined player she’s ever coached, a quality that helped Amihere persevere when the losses inevitably set in: two ACL tears almost benched her for good, and her oldest brother, Kofi, died suddenly last August.

Grieving her basketball-loving brother only further pushed Amihere to become one of the game’s most powerful players. This spring, she was selected eighth overall by the Atlanta Dream in the WNBA draft, kissing a photo of Kofi before she took the stage. Off court, Amihere, now 21, is working to ensure that the next generation of towering tweens won’t need the input of total strangers to realize their potential. (If you’re curious, Amihere’s current height is six-foot-three, three inches above the WNBA’s average.) Last year, she founded Back to the Motherland, a not-for-profit that brings basketball to underserved communities in West Africa, where Amihere’s parents are from. She also signed her first big sponsorship with Under Armour in May. There’s buzz surrounding the possible creation of Canada’s first WNBA team in Toronto. If the time comes for her to play on home soil again, she certainly won’t be on water duty.

—Courtney Shea

The Need for Speed

This summer, Formula One fans will watch cars scorch around Circuit Gilles Villeneuve in record time. Its new paddock came together just as quickly.

AT FULL TILT, Formula One cars can top 300 kilometres an hour. That means any nearby structures have to be robust. The schedule for building a sturdy, sophisticated new grandstand for the 2019 Canadian Grand Prix was set to turbo, too. In 2018, the city of Montreal was on the hook with F1 for a new viewing zone to flank Circuit Gilles Villeneuve, the historic four-kilometre track that's hosted Canada's most elite auto event since 1978. Just 10 months remained before the next F1 stopover, so the project started as a race against time—and all the usual supply-chain delays.

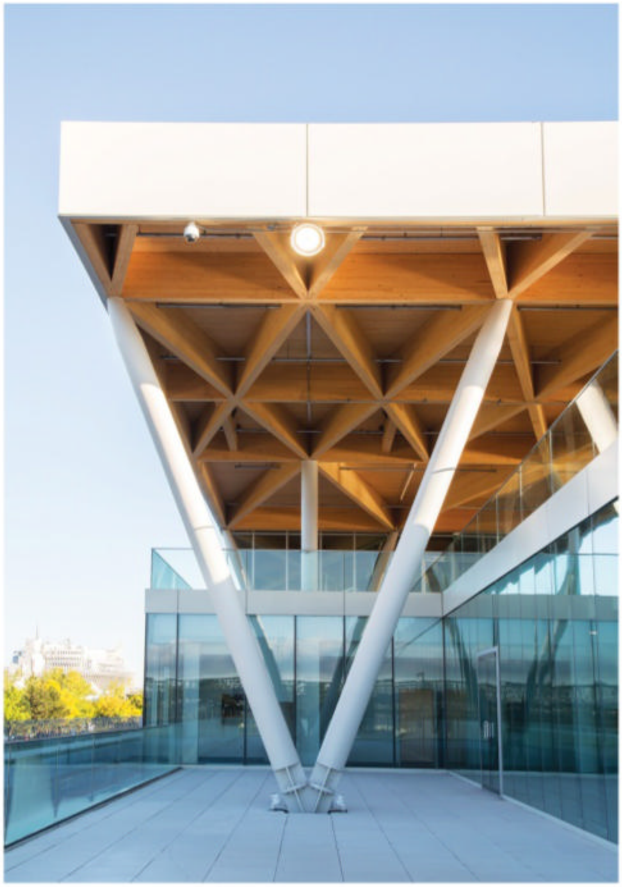
The city approved $50 million for Éric Gauthier, a senior partner at local architecture firm FABG, to realize his vision: a timber-heavy, minimalist paddock that departed from the fun but flagrant gas-guzzling ethos of F1 in favour of greener choices. The new build, set to replace the original rickety steel paddock, would maintain all the luxurious wow factors of a world-class racing facility: 13 stables for drivers (and their trusty pit crews); a suite of offices for the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile, or FIA; an updated multimedia centre for journalists; and two sweeping, open-air terraces with gourmet-dining pop-ups and open bars—perfect for celebratory visits from champagne-soaked F1 winners.

Gauthier quickly recruited a team of roughly 500 builders to erect a skeleton of steel beams and columns and prefabricated concrete panels. (Mixing materials, Gauthier thought, would help offset any shipping snags and let him finish the build on time.) The paddock's roof was composed of cross-laminated Quebec timber: each cubic metre of it stores roughly a ton of atmospheric carbon dioxide, sequestered during the trees' life cycles.

In May of 2019, with four weeks remaining until race day, the paddock reached its final form: a gargantuan 250,000-square-foot complex with 5,000 seats, each with views of natural landmarks like Jean-Doré Beach, Mount Royal and the St. Lawrence River. The track is used year-round by runners and cyclists, but there's nothing quite like the energy that zips around it when Formula One comes to town—this year, on June 18. Racing season is when it really comes alive.

—Alex Cyr

QUICK CHANGE The building's steel, wood and concrete partitions are designed to be easily dismantled and recycled for use in future projects



MAKING HISTORY The paddock's wooden roof rests atop rows of Y-shaped columns, which Gauthier modelled after the iconic outstretched arms of the Expo 67 logo. The event took place on these exact grounds more than 50 years ago.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **STEVE MONTPETIT**

THE END OF HOMEOWN

By MICHELLE CYCA

ERSHIP

For generations, middle-class Canadians have been sold on the promise of homeownership. ***The promise was always flawed. Today it's simply broken.***

I WAS BORN IN Vancouver in 1987, and I've lived here nearly all my life. Anyone of my generation who grew up in this city spent their youth hearing constantly about the twin dangers that imperilled our future: a city-annihilating earthquake, and the always-rising cost of housing. Either might one day make living here impossible. Both felt vast and inevitable, forces beyond our control. So we carried on in the face of disaster, doing our best to ignore it.

In 1992, the year I did my first earthquake drill in kindergarten, Vancouver overtook Toronto as the most expensive housing market in the country. After finishing an undergraduate degree in Victoria, I returned in 2009 and spent my 20s moving from one rental to another—seven apartments, six neighbourhoods and five roommates in all. Fourteen years ago, it was still possible to find an apartment for $650 or $700 a month, especially if you were willing, as I was, to tolerate a gas leak, a creepy landlord or a solarium repurposed as a bedroom in exchange for below-market rent.

A few of my friends even made the leap into ownership in their 20s, almost always with the help of family. In the early 2010s, you could get a small one-bedroom or a studio apartment for $300,000 or so. That was a significant downgrade from my parents' generation, for whom an equivalent inflation-adjusted sum would have bought a single-family home nearly anywhere in the city. But it was a foothold on the property ladder, and I believed then that it would be possible for all of us to do the same, to make our homes in this city we loved. We would, somehow, follow the upward trajectory of previous generations, whose rising incomes allowed them to graduate to homeownership in due course.

Besides, the market had to correct eventually, right? How could it not, as the chasm between incomes and cost of living kept growing? In 2012, when the benchmark property price in metro Vancouver was $638,000, Yale University economics professor and housing analyst Robert Shiller predicted a crash: "Just because it's a nice place to live doesn't mean prices are going to go up forever," he said.

But they haven't stopped climbing yet. The benchmark property now costs $1.2 million, propelled upward year after year by low interest rates, constrained supply, investor speculation and a growing population. And year after year, I've watched as more friends have left Vancouver for smaller towns, or Alberta, where they could afford a dog, a yard, a baby.

In retrospect, they were lucky to have left when there was still somewhere else to go. While an impending big earthquake remains a localized source of dread, the fear and anxiety surrounding housing has exploded into a national phenomenon. The benchmark property price across Canada more than doubled between 2015 and 2022, from $409,000 to $861,000. In the same period, average wages increased only 23 per cent, not accounting for inflation.

Cities large and small, from Victoria to Toronto to Windsor to Moncton, are now grappling with the same intractable problems. There is too little housing, far too little affordable housing and far too many investors bidding houses up and out of reach, creating a rapidly widening divide between Canada's housing haves and have-nots. Those fortunate enough to already own property have watched their net worth soar along with the value of their homes, even as millions of others have been shut out. In 1986, a young adult working full time could expect to save for a down payment in five years. Now, they'd have to save for 17 years—nearly 30 in Vancouver or Toronto.

For decades, Canadian society has positioned homeownership as a promise, a sure path to security and prosperity. As it slips out of reach, young Canadians are struggling to build community, start families and plan for the future. At this scale, the problem doesn't resemble an earthquake so much as a more human-caused catastrophe. Like climate change, it's the result of policy choices and behaviours that have tipped the scales toward disaster for decades.

The result is a pervasive sense of what I've come to think of as housing nihilism, especially among those under 40—millennials and Gen Z—who are most affected. In conversations with thwarted would-be homeowners across the country while writing this story, I heard the same feelings reiterated time after time. There was anger at the ever-growing unattainability of homeownership, at the loss of the stability it represents and of an inheritance for the next generation. There was resentment at being relegated to indefinite renting in a cutthroat market controlled by an increasingly exclusive cohort of the housing haves. And there was despair at their straitjacketed circumstances—because the rental market has gone just as haywire, and many can't afford to move. If they do, they'll be forced to leave their cities altogether, and their careers, friends and families.

We talk about the housing crisis all the time—in headlines, on playgrounds, at dinner parties, on social media. We talk about how our government should fix it: radical rezoning, more supply, more public housing, taxes on speculation and foreign owners and empty houses. There are lots of solutions, but none are silver bullets. All will take years or decades to make a difference. In the meantime, the disparity between property owners and everyone

Previous spread: photo illustration by Maclean's

else is already eroding generational ties and stoking bitter resentment. It risks distorting our politics, the functioning of our cities and younger Canadians’ financial security. If nothing changes, homeowners will keep getting wealthier, but even they won’t be able to kick the costs down the road forever.

CANADA HASN’T ALWAYS been a nation obsessed with homeownership. Before the Second World War, fewer than half of Canada’s city dwellers owned their own property. The authors of the 1931 census report even declared that the advantages of homeownership were “undermined in urban areas by the convenience and attractiveness of modern multiple-unit dwellings”—renting, in other words.

After the war, everything changed. To accommodate returning veterans and an influx of immigrants, and to create jobs that would sustain the postwar economy, the federal government made massive investments in housing. It built nearly 45,000 homes across the country and, in 1946, created the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The CMHC administered housing programs, making loans to builders and homeowners and overseeing social housing. It also extended favourable mortgage terms to borrowers. In 1954, the government began insuring private mortgages. With loans guaranteed by the government, banks were more willing to lend money. That lowered barriers to homeownership and helped spawn an explosion in single-family housing in Canada’s rapidly growing suburbs.

The combination of accessible mortgages and cheap housing quickly turned Canada into a homeownership society, making middle-class Canadians into masters of their own little domains. In metro Toronto, the homeownership rate grew from 40 per cent of households in the 1930s to a peak of nearly 70 per cent in 2011. A home became one of the primary foundations on which individual Canadians built their financial well-being—not just a place to live, but a rock-solid financial asset.

Of course, the benefits of homeownership were never truly democratic. Low-income Canadians, disproportionately racialized, have always had lower rates of ownership, and Indigenous people have been particularly excluded from its benefits. Under the Indian Act, First Nations people on reserve don’t own the land where they live. They’ve never been able to build intergenerational wealth through housing the way non-Indigenous homeowners have.

Still, as long as housing prices tracked upward in line with incomes, the central promise of an ownership-driven society remained intact for Canada’s mainstream middle class. If you put in the hard work, you too could buy a home.

That was still the case until relatively recently, even in our biggest cities. After a price run-up in the 1980s, the average home in the Greater Toronto Area declined in value during the first half of the ’90s, dropping from $255,000 in 1990 to $198,000 in 1996. Prices settled modestly higher by the end of the decade, at $228,000. But in the early 2000s, as mortgage rates continued to fall, prices began climbing faster. By 2005, the average GTA home cost $336,000. By 2011, the figure was $465,000. Suddenly, being a homeowner, at least in certain cities, was a licence to print money.

> *Year after year, I watched friends leave for smaller towns, where they could afford a dog, a yard, a baby. They were lucky there was still somewhere else to go.*

In hindsight, that marked the point of departure. Spurred on by low interest rates, growing populations and an inadequate supply of new housing, home prices started rising much, much faster than incomes. From 2001 to 2011, the average GTA home more than doubled in value, while incomes stagnated—the median household income in the area rose from $59,000 in 2001 to only $70,000 in 2011. (That looks like an 18 per cent increase on paper, but it’s actually a decrease in real terms, slightly below the rate of inflation.)

That decoupling accelerated in 2009, after the Bank of Canada dropped interest rates further to shield Canada from the kind of housing crash that decimated the United States. It worked. Home prices climbed faster than ever, propping up the Canadian economy. This lopsided national reliance on real estate has only grown in the past 15 years. Today, buying, selling and leasing property represents the largest segment of our national GDP, at 13 per cent. More than a fifth of our national wealth is tied up in housing. Property owners have always enjoyed more wealth than renters, but that disparity has grown too. In 2019, their average net worth, at $685,400, exceeded that of renters by 29 times. As housing inflation has made property owners richer, many have leveraged that equity to buy more, concentrating more Canadian property in fewer hands. Multiple-property owners now own nearly one-third of homes in Ontario and B.C., and around 40 per cent in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

Arguably, the downfall of our precarious system began in 2011, when the homeownership rate nationally peaked at 69 per cent. Or at some point in the years since, as housing prices in cities across Canada climbed to new heights of unattainability. But there’s another factor that has recently poured fuel on the flames, and turned a smouldering crisis, primarily in a few cities, into a nationwide wildfire: the pandemic.

IN MARCH OF 2020, two things happened: across the country, people sheltered at home from COVID-19, and the Bank of Canada dropped interest rates from 1.75 to 0.25 per cent to quell the economic shockwaves by making it easier to borrow money. The CMHC, around the same time, warned that a pandemic-induced financial shock could cause home prices to plunge by up to 18 per cent, causing one-fifth of mortgage holders to default and triggering years of economic chaos. Many banks lowered mortgage rates below two per cent to bolster sales. In December of 2020, HSBC offered a variable mortgage rate of just 0.99 per cent, the lowest in Canadian history.

Instead of the predicted crash, the market exploded. Many Canadians struggled financially during the first year of the pandemic, but others took advantage of those low rates to go house shopping. As the rise of remote work loosened ties between urban cores and white-collar employees,

PHOTOGRAPH BY **ALANA PATERSON**

many decamped from expensive regions in search of cheaper housing, spreading unaffordability outward. In the second half of 2021, more than 123,000 Canadians moved provinces—the highest rate of interprovincial migration since 1991.

What happened next was a nationwide game of musical chairs, as everyone stood up at the same time, looking for a new place to land. In Toronto and Vancouver, unremarkable homes routinely sold for half a million dollars or more over asking. Houses in Ontario's cottage country went for double their listed prices. By March of 2022, Canada's benchmark property price across the country was $861,000—28 per cent more than a year before, 54 per cent more than two years before and 130 per cent more than 10 years before. A detached house in a large city would set you even further back. In Vancouver, the benchmark price for a single-family house reached nearly $2.1 million.

For many hopeful buyers, this was when the music stopped and they found themselves without a place to sit. The hardest-hit communities weren't the already unaffordable big cities, with their multi-million-dollar homes, but the smaller cities and towns upon which hordes of bargain seekers had descended. The result was a rapid distortion of local housing markets from coast to coast. In Chilliwack, a sleepy city in B.C.'s Fraser Valley, prices rose 40 per cent in 2021. New Brunswick's price increases outpaced Ontario's, up 25 per cent in 2021, with Prince Edward Island close behind. Millions of mostly young Canadians living in such places saw their long-standing expectations for homeownership vanish nearly overnight.

Among them were Samantha Ireland and Alex Ullman, a young couple in Waterloo, Ontario, who started saving in 2018 for a down payment. Ireland was then 24 years old, a recent massage school graduate launching her career at a sports medicine clinic. Ullman, then 26, was planning to open a running-gear store. They hoped to buy a home after getting their professional footing and paying off their student and business debts. In the meantime, they were paying $1,295 for a rental apartment rife with issues—plumbing problems, constant noise and a balcony unusable for years due to endless building repairs. Still, they figured they could put up with it until they were ready to go house hunting.

By 2021, they had saved enough to start looking for a condo. Unfortunately, that was exactly when the local housing market, which had already escalated over just a few years, went into overdrive. Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo experienced one of the most dramatic pandemic price increases in the country: in early 2022, the benchmark price for a home reached $958,000, compared to $550,000 24 months prior.

NO PLACE TO GO Samantha Ireland and Alex Ullman were ready in 2021 to leave their problem-plagued Waterloo, Ontario, apartment and go condo shopping. Then the city had some of Canada's most extreme pandemic price inflation. They're unsure if they'll ever be able to buy.

By March of 2022, Canada's benchmark home price was $861,000—54 per cent more than two years prior, and 130 per cent more than a decade prior

Ireland and Ullman had arrived at the station just in time to see the last train depart. The rental market was just as hot, and despite its many shortcomings, their semi-habitable apartment was suddenly too cheap to give up. On average, a two-bedroom like theirs now goes for almost $2,400; moving is impossible if they still want to save. "So we're stuck," says Ireland.

Because Canada has spent the past three-quarters of a century putting most of its housing eggs in the homeownership basket, the country hasn't built enough new rental housing. Back in the 1940s, homeownership was supposed to be the engine that would drive the postwar economy, says Andy Yan, an urban planner and director of the city program at Simon Fraser University. "But we also introduced the belief that this was the only way to provide long-term housing for households." In particular, the focus on building single-family homes—and protecting the wealth of their owners—led many cities to limit the construction of apartment buildings and reserve most residential land for detached houses, generating value for homeowners but dramatically restricting the supply of new rental housing.

New rentals instead are increasingly found in condos, owned by both corporate investors and independent landlords. They are, on average, much smaller than the purpose-built apartments of decades past, and often poorly suited to the needs of family life—the average new-build condo in Ontario today is only 700 square feet. Because the federal and provincial governments have mostly stopped building social housing, low-income tenants are often left competing with the growing ranks of frustrated prospective homeowners for the same rental stock. And mobility, the great purported advantage of renting, has disappeared as rents have risen. Renters like Ullman and Ireland are shackled in place not by a mortgage, but by the certainty that moving will mean paying far more every month.

The couple are still saving, hoping to eventually buy a condo. But they know whatever they can find will probably be smaller than where they live, and stretch their finances to the limit. They'll also be in competition with the deep-pocketed investors who own more than three-quarters of newly built condo units in Waterloo. "We'd probably be up against three investors who can outbid us," says Ullman. "I hate to say it, but that's what I'd do too. Buy a property, rent it out—it's the easiest way to make a ton of money each year. It'd be easier than owning a running store, that's for sure."

Even as the prospect of spending half a million dollars on 500 square feet strikes them both as absurd, so does leaving their hometown—and with it, their families and the careers they've worked hard to build. "It feels like the only way to afford a home is to move to the East Coast, where houses are half the price," says Ullman. "But then we'd have to start a whole new life."

If they did make the move, they'd find that the East Coast is also far less accessible than it used to be. The Maritimes experienced enormous population growth during the pandemic, fuelled in part by relatively affordable housing markets, which have warped under the pressure. For Sarah Peacock, that change came as a shock. For 12 years in Vancouver, she worked as an art therapist, and her partner as a teacher. They moved to Nova Scotia with their young son in the summer of 2021. Both are originally from the Halifax area, and they'd always planned to return. But the timing was decided for them once they learned that their landlord planned to move her mother-in-law into their rental suite.

"I think we took it for granted that we could always move back to the Maritimes and buy a house," says Peacock, who just turned 40. That safety valve had disappeared by the time they made the move. By that summer, benchmark property prices in Halifax had reached $434,000, up from $301,000 only two years prior. (The most recent figure is $507,000.)

Fortunately for Peacock, her family was able to move in with her mother—an arrangement with many benefits, particularly since she gave birth to her second son last year. Rather than buy their own place, Peacock and her partner plan to continue living with her mother, who will eventually sell her current home so they can try to purchase a place together.

My ability to stay in the city of my birth was also a stroke of generational good fortune. In 1976, my parents were just a few years out of university when they bought a boxy one-and-a-half-storey house, with a tiny front porch and an apple tree in the backyard, in Vancouver's west-side Kerrisdale neighbourhood. They had no parental assistance, but the house only cost $56,000, less than three times the average household income of $19,000 at the time. (If its value had kept pace with inflation, it would be worth just over $294,000 today. Instead, it's valued at just over $2 million—more than 24 times Vancouver's median household income of $82,000.)

In 2018, my husband and I started talking about having a baby. We knew we would have to move on from our one-room, 650-square-foot studio condo on the edge of Chinatown. But owning that condo, which had doubled in value since my husband purchased it for $338,000 in 2009, gave us more options than many of our friends. Some of them were uncertain when, or if, they could afford to have kids at all. Still, to purchase anything with two bedrooms, let alone a patch of grass, would have required us to leave the city. The prospect of having a baby in a new community, far from friends and family, was hard to swallow. At the same time, my parents were entering their 70s and thinking about downsizing out of their by then ultra-valuable home. The solution became obvious. After a year of cleaning, packing and renovating, they moved into the newly refurbished garden level. My husband and I moved upstairs, a few months before our daughter was born.

This living arrangement marks me as a member of an under-discussed demographic: the nepo babies of the housing market. Since 1977, homeowners have acquired more than $3.2 trillion dollars in wealth, which today is flowing downward to their children, amplifying inequality across generations. I'm grateful for my circumstances, but I know it has nothing to do with my own virtue or achievement. Canada's housing market is no more meritocratic than a lottery—and some of us hold winning tickets printed long before we were born.

> *During the pandemic, prices soared, and Canadians in cheaper cities saw their long-standing expectations for homeownership vanish nearly overnight*

SHORTLY AFTER MOVING, I noticed something striking about the neighbourhood: there were no kids around. Or far fewer than there used to be, anyway. When I was young, there was always someone to play with at the park, and tiny princesses and superheroes crowded the streets at Halloween. Today, when I take my daughter to the playground, she's often the only one there. It's not just my imagination: in the past few years, my neighbourhood has lost residents of all ages, and young ones especially. Since 2001, the number of children under 15 in the census tract surrounding my home has shrunk by 25 per cent. Vancouver overall is increasingly bereft of the very young, with fewer children per capita than any other Canadian city of more than 250,000 people.

This isn't only my neighbourhood, or my city. In 2021, there were 20,000 fewer children under 15 in the Greater Toronto Area than in 2016. Toronto proper has been losing kids for even longer, largely to cheaper cities. And as bargains become harder to find, there's good reason to believe that the size and structure of Canadian families will change. One of the most widely cited studies on the relationship between homeownership and fertility comes from the U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research, which found in 2012 that a 10 per cent increase in housing prices led to modestly higher birth rates—but only for homeowners, who enjoyed a bump in their net worth. Birth rates fell among renters. Consider that homeownership among Canadians of child-rearing age is rapidly declining, and the implications become clear. In 2011, 44 per cent of people 25 to 29 were homeowners; by 2021 that had declined to 36.5 per cent. In B.C. and Ontario, our most expensive provinces, the data shows that people wait longer than elsewhere to have children—in B.C., the average age at which women bear their first child is 31.6, the highest in the country.

Falling birth rates and aging cities mean more than empty playgrounds. They mean, over time, added stress on a labour market that will stagger under the burden of an older population. And they mean reduced tax revenues thanks to a shrinking working-age population, even as the costs of health care and pensions go up.

Ashley Jardine is one young parent who had to choose between space for a growing

EAST COAST INFLATION Sarah Peacock and her partner, Christian Kyle, were evicted from their Vancouver apartment in 2021. They moved their family to her hometown, Halifax, only to find the market overheated by record population growth and demand. They now live with her mother.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **MEGHAN TANSEY WHITTON**

PRICED OUT Unable to afford space for her family in Vancouver, Ashley Jardine moved with her partner and two children in 2020 to nearby Bowen Island. As a renter, she worries their housing is precarious, and she doesn't know where they'll go next. "I feel a kind of desperation," she says.

family and life in the city. In March of 2020, at 34 years old, she and her partner moved to Bowen Island, a 20-minute ferry ride from Vancouver, where they could afford to size up from a one-bedroom loft to a rented house, with room for two young kids and a rambunctious dog. They fell in love with the folksy island community and worked hard to save a down payment for a home there.

But here the same old story repeated itself. By the following spring, prices had risen well over 30 per cent, and their landlords seized the hot market to sell. They offered Jardine the chance to buy the house privately, but she couldn't afford the $850,000 asking price. Even that was a bargain, with most houses on the island selling for more than $1 million. They found another rental, but they know that isn't a permanent situation either. Today, a sense of precarity looms over the family's otherwise idyllic situation.

And as a renter, Jardine senses an invisible wedge between her family and the neighbours. She wonders why she's putting so much into a community she knows she'll one day be forced to leave: "I feel a kind of desperation. And I'm also very bitter about it. I don't want to go."

That bitterness is not unique to her. In May of 2023, a survey conducted for the *Globe and Mail* found that more than half of respondents between 20 and 40 were "angry" or "furious" about the housing market. Alex Ullman, describing the way investors have gobbled up new housing in Waterloo, keeping out prospective young buyers like himself, echoed that outrage. "It pisses me off," he says.

A TD Economics report released last year made starkly clear the consequences for individuals and families of this growing division. "Wealth inequality in Canada is not just a story of rich versus poor, it is one of homeowners versus non-homeowners," the authors wrote. "With affordability now at its worst level in decades, the current generation of prospective homebuyers is facing the fate of missing out on housing wealth." That wealth is a key instrument by which Canadians have—by design, since the 1940s—built their financial security.

"Even someone who owns a 450-square-foot apartment has access to all these tools that a renter doesn't," says Andy Yan. Consider, he says, the tax credits and forgivable loans the government lavishes on buyers for renovations. Or the fact that a home is one of the few investments Canadians can sell without paying capital gains tax. There's also the small fortune available to many owners in home equity credit, and, of course, the equity itself.

Economists and personal finance experts have long warned that our overreliance on a single asset for financial security invites disaster, especially in a crash. The effort we put into building housing equity may be better invested in the stock market, some argue. But with the dramatic escalation of rents, it's hard to imagine that very many of those households shut out of homeownership have enough money to pay rent and invest as much as they'd otherwise spend on a mortgage.

It's no wonder Ullman is pissed off.

AS THE PROMISE OF homeownership is denied to Canadians, new fractures will grow: between young and old, between neighbours, between regions and between political factions. That frustration Alex Ullman and countless others feel will boil over in a hundred different ways. It already has.

You can see it in the way it has inflamed tensions between provinces, as homeowners from more expensive areas flock to cheaper ones. Nearly 89,000 Ontarians left that province in the first years of

PHOTOGRAPH BY **ALANA PATERSON**

the pandemic, many in search of cheaper housing, driving up unaffordability elsewhere and stoking resentment against perceived interlopers. One Toronto couple, who started a TikTok to document their renovation of a Victorian house in Nova Scotia—after selling a 490-square-foot Toronto condo—garnered furious messages from some locals. “Congratulations, you’re what every single Nova Scotian hates right now,” went one missive. “Thanks for destroying our home.”

You see it too in the constant urban battles around new development, usually featuring homeowners digging in their heels against new housing. Examples are too numerous to count, but one of the most headline-grabbing examples in the past couple of years has been—where else—in Vancouver. In 2001, the Squamish First Nation successfully reclaimed a historic village site called Sen̓áḵw, not far from downtown. In 2019, the nation announced plans to build 6,000 rental homes on the 10.5-acre parcel—a level of density far beyond what would be allowed under municipal zoning, but permissible because, as First Nations land, Sen̓áḵw is not beholden to city rules. A major goal of the Squamish housing strategy is allowing their members to build the kind of housing wealth that has historically been out of reach for First Nations—not to mention building homes for thousands of people in a city experiencing a dire shortage of housing. This has drawn fierce opposition from homeowners in nearby Kitsilano, a 1960s hippie enclave that has aged into one of the city’s most expensive communities. A nearby neighbourhood association has even gone to the B.C. Supreme Court to seek a judicial review of an agreement struck between the First Nation and the city, which would require the city to provide municipal services to the development. (The request remains in limbo as of this writing.)

What is newer is pushback against this kind of NIMBYism, from so-called YIMBYs (for “yes in my backyard”)—generally younger people and housing advocates hopeful that a dramatic injection of new housing supply will help stem the tide of unaffordability, regardless of how extant homeowners feel about it. Such groups are now finding themselves up against NIMBY groups, lobbying elected representatives and pushing for zoning reform they hope will permit more housing to be built in more places.

These clashes will be drawn in large part along generational lines, as younger Canadians find themselves left out of the homeownership bonanza of the past two decades. And as the gap between housing haves and have-nots grows, the pressure will move downward to crush those already most vulnerable. Those hit hardest will still, just as in the past, be those most disadvantaged, including people of colour and Indigenous people. That gap is getting wider: homeownership rates among Black Canadians, already the lowest in the country, fell by nearly eight per cent between 2011 and 2016. We will also be faced with more visible signs of dysfunction, like the tent cities of the unhoused that popped up and grew dramatically from coast to coast during the pandemic years.

As the promise of homeownership is denied to more and more of us, new fractures will grow, between generations, neighbours, regions and political factions

Political polarization may also intensify. In 2021, British researchers analyzed recent electoral results in 11 European countries. They concluded that not only were renters and homeowners politically divided, those divisions grew as homes became less affordable. Homeowners became less supportive of policies such as rent control or tax reform to help non-owners, and even less supportive of building new housing. Renters moved in the opposite direction. “The beneficiaries of unaffordability will prefer to keep policies and parties in place that keep prices high and rising,” concluded the authors. “They do so at the cost of growing polarization between renters and owners.”

Of course, any politician, left or right, can capitalize on righteous populist anger over the cost of housing. In Canada, Conservative Party Leader Pierre Poilievre has successfully seized on house prices as a wedge issue. Paul Kershaw is a policy professor at the University of British Columbia’s School of Population and Public Health, and the founder of Generation Squeeze, a think tank focused on addressing generational unfairness. “Poilievre is tapping into the anger of a younger demographic in a way that the Conservative Party typically has not,” he says. “The growing generational inequality, in terms of wealth and access to housing security, may change the way young and old map onto political affiliations, and what those affiliations mean.”

In other words, uncharted territory for typically rock-steady Canadian politics. Young voters have been key to electing the last two Liberal governments, but the current government has little credibility with that demographic on this file. That may have something to do with the fact that multiple-property owners, who have profited enormously from the past few years’ run-up in property values, are well-represented in government. More than 100 MPs, comprising more than one-third of Parliament, own multiple properties. They include the federal minister of housing, Ahmed Hussen, and Taleeb Noormohamed, MP for Vancouver Granville, who has made nearly $5 million dollars since 2005 selling more than 40 properties in Metro Vancouver. His constituents, meanwhile, are increasingly locked out of the financial benefits that owning even one home confers.

“We’ve screwed over young people, and we’ve screwed over newcomers of every age,” says Kershaw. “The group we need to tap into is the older demographic, who have been securely housed and made wealthier. We need to have a moral conversation about what it means to be on the sidelines.”

Otherwise, the outcome is clear. More and more Canadian neighbourhoods will begin to resemble mine: quiet and lonely communities accessible only to the privileged few who have already acquired or inherited housing wealth, and who seek to get richer still. Ultimately, all of us will pay the price. ■

I placed my first wager when I was 10, on a Leafs-Habs hockey game. Over the years, I gambled more than $1 million, risking my health and family in the process.

Betting My Life

A memoir of addiction, desperation and the dangers of sports betting **by Noah Vineberg**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RÉMI THÉRIAULT**
PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY **ANNA MINZHULINA**

For the past 20 years, I've been a public bus driver in Ottawa. I've seen a lot of change during that time: new highrises in the downtown core, big-box stores dotting the suburbs, rail transit emerging above and below ground. To me, though, the biggest change has been the rise of sports betting ads. Ever since the federal government legalized single-game sports betting in 2021, flashy advertisements for gambling sites have popped up everywhere. On billboards towering over roadways. On posters plastered to the sides of buildings. On the backs of other buses. On sports radio. During my shifts, I hear teens and twentysomethings discuss their bets as they board the bus.

I'm a recovering gambling addict, abstinent since 2018. Over the past few decades, I've played through more than $1 million, betting on games like house poker and virtual blackjack—even gas station scratcher cards. Of that total, more than $600,000 went to sports gambling. I've laid down wagers on hockey, football, horse racing, even cricket, even though I don't know a damn thing about cricket. I did most of it illegally, placing bets with bookies or foreign sports gambling sites.

When I see the new ads around Ottawa, I get angry. I know that recovering addicts like me are going to struggle with temptation. I've experienced first-hand how sports betting can ruin a life. I've lied to family members, compromised marriages, missed mortgage payments, contemplated suicide, all because of my addiction. I've lost a hell of a lot more than money.

GROWING UP, I lived with my parents in Lower Town, just outside of Ottawa's downtown core. My mother handled most of the parenting while working full time for the government. My father was the sales director at a big printing company. I idolized him. He lived like a rock star, staying out late, treating his clients to dinners at Al's Steakhouse or the Keg, driving fancy cars, walking around in tailored Harry Rosen suits. People were drawn to him.

During those dinners at the Keg, the wine was always flowing. Everyone ordered three courses, starters, appetizers, desserts, racking up a bill of at least $1,000. My father always picked up the cheque, typically for up to 10 people. He never flinched when it came time to pay. He also had a 28-foot Chris-Craft boat that he docked in Westport, a village on the banks of Upper Rideau Lake. The boat slept eight people and had its own kitchen and bathroom. On weekends, my father hosted big parties on the lake, tying six boats together. They were filled with friends, family and work associates. He always stopped at the LCBO first to stock up on booze for everyone.

By 2018, I owed $49,000 to my bookie and $26,000 on credit cards. We had to refinance our house to cover the debt.

My dad's swaggering lifestyle came at a cost for our family. He was always away on work trips. He regularly had affairs. How do I know? Well, starting from when I was eight, he brought me along. At least a couple of times a year, we hopped in the car and visited his girlfriends around the city. When we arrived, he would turn to me and say, "Noah, go downstairs and play with her kids, distract them." So that's what I did. On the drive home, he told me to keep everything to myself. "Make sure you never tell Mom; otherwise we'll have to split up. Tell her we went to the movies."

I kept his secrets. In exchange, he rewarded me with money and gifts. It was an unwritten contract: if my mother never found out, I got pretty much whatever I wanted. Among my friends, I was considered the spoiled one. I always had the latest and greatest toys, goalie equipment and video game consoles. I usually received $20 a day for lunch, a lot for a kid in the '70s and '80s. The meal only cost $5, leaving me with a tidy surplus. I liked walking around with a wad of cash in my pocket. Young men can learn a lot from their fathers. Unfortunately, I got an education in selfish, deceptive behaviour.

As a little kid, I was obsessed with sports. I played road hockey into the wee hours of the night with my friends. I watched *Sportsline* and *The George Michael Sports Machine* obsessively. I rooted for the Chicago Blackhawks in hockey and the Minnesota Vikings in football. My love of sports was a gateway to sports betting. And I caught that bug early. Like, really early: by Grade 3, in 1984, I was running fantasy hockey pools for my classmates, setting up a draft, creating brackets and tracking statistics. For a $10 buy-in, everyone picked a handful of NHL players and earned points based on their performance throughout the season. The winner took home the pot at the end of the year. Remember, this was the pre-internet era, before up-to-the-second phone updates were the norm. So I regularly woke up early to get the newspaper and look at the scores from the night before. Sports gambling gave me a social advantage, a way to create relationships, a consistent topic to discuss with friends. I even bet on the lunchtime schoolyard football games.

The same year, my parents divorced and my father moved out. He married a younger woman and bought a house across town. I did the back-and-forth thing for a little while, spending every second weekend at my father's place, but as I got older, the arrangement changed. I saw him less

and less. Eventually, I was only going over to his place for an occasional dinner. In 1989, when I was 15, my dad left again—this time for Costa Rica. He planned to retire down there. I knew he would never live in Ottawa again.

I attended St. Matthew High School in Orléans, a suburb just east of the city. By then, I lived nearby with my mother and her new partner. I skipped class most of the time. In the mornings, I forged my mother's signature during home room and signed out for the day. Then I took the 10-minute bus ride to Place d'Orléans, a shopping mall that had an OLG lottery kiosk where I could buy Pro-Line tickets. At the time, there were only two legal forms of sports betting in Canada: horse racing and Pro-Line. Most people are familiar with the former. Pro-Line, however, is more complex. It's parlay-style gambling, which involves accurately predicting the outcome of anywhere from three to 10 sporting events. I grabbed tickets off the counter and ticked off my picks. All of it happened on paper. For example, I might bet on the Leafs to beat the Flames in hockey, the Bills to beat the Giants in football and the Blue Jays to beat the Mariners in baseball. The more games I picked, the higher the payout. And I only won if all my predictions were correct.

I spent anywhere from $50 to $150 a day on Pro-Line tickets, using my daily allowance or money I made running the salad bar at the Keg, which paid $13 an hour and up to $300 in tips on a good night. It left me with more than enough cash to support my burgeoning habit. I don't think my mom ever suspected anything—at least not until later in life. There wasn't a day that went by where I didn't place at least one bet. The legal gambling age was 18, but back then, the tellers never asked for ID. If I was lucky, I won once every few weeks. One time, I put down $100 and accurately picked the outcome of all 10 games, which resulted in an $11,000 payout. I was never smart enough to save the money from my wins, though. I usually dumped it right back into more bets.

Whenever I bought Pro-Line tickets at Place d'Orléans, I'd walk five minutes to the Broken Cue, a pool hall and arcade. That's where I hung out for the day. I never cared about school because I was always finding a way to make money, working odd jobs or placing bets—and I figured I would eventually get rich gambling. I was arrogant. I had friends do homework and take tests for me. The Broken Cue was a big, brightly lit place with at least 15 pool tables and 30-odd video game machines. I liked to play pool against the regulars, but I was lousy at the game and I usually lost. Otherwise, I hung out at the counter, poring over the newspaper, looking at the betting odds. I placed wagers with a big Lebanese bookie named George, who took action on major sporting events like the Super Bowl.

I loved the waiting that came with gambling: those final, dramatic moments of uncertainty, when a last-minute field goal or three-point shot could alter the result of the game. The feeling of anticipation—that's where I got the high. And when I had several bets going on at once, it felt like my brain was on fire, the ultimate stimulation. Nothing else mattered in those moments. Even if I lost, I never let on that I cared. That was part of the appeal, too. People never knew if I had $100 or $10,000 in the bank. I felt like I was bulletproof, like no matter how it turned out, everything would be all right.

In 1993, I graduated from St. Matthew—just barely, after wasting a couple of years in the Broken Cue. I was 19 at the time, a year and a half older than my peers. Right away, I married my high school sweetheart. By 1996, I was working two minimum-wage jobs. In the mornings, from 2:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m., I loaded trucks for UPS. Then, during the day, I worked in shipping and receiving for Addition Elle, a women's clothing store. My wife and I were living in an apartment in the suburbs, and I needed both jobs to pay for our expenses and my habit.

I gambled whenever I could, spending a couple hundred bucks a day. I played poker with my buddies, plugged away at Pro-Line and bought lottery tickets just to look at numbers. I was stuck in married life at a relatively young age, and gambling made me feel alive with possibility. Things quickly spiralled out of control. This was near the beginning of Money Mart, the chain of cash-advance spots that allow customers to borrow up to 60 per cent against their next paycheques. I would bring my pay stubs from UPS and Addition Elle, usually totalling about $6,000 with overtime, to several Money Mart locations, taking out as much as I could. But the interest was roughly 40 per cent. Eventually, I owed $60,000. I'd maxed out credit cards and a line of credit. In 1999, I had to file for bankruptcy.

My wife and I decided to divorce the following year. We realized we weren't a good fit, and I wasn't ready to accept responsibility for my actions. I stayed in denial, happily blaming my ex if anyone asked why the marriage ended. It took me a couple of years to pay off my debt to creditors after that.

In 2002, I started driving a bus for the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Transit Commission. By then, I had a new girlfriend, and we'd recently had a child. For a little while, we all lived in a three-bedroom apartment, paying $1,250 a month, but eventually, we wanted a bigger house. In 2003, I went down to Costa Rica and borrowed around $70,000 from my father, no strings attached. With $40,000 of that loan, I made a down payment on a four-bedroom semi-detached in the Ottawa suburb of Beacon Hill. The rest went toward gambling.

At the time, poker was surging in popularity. A boom in online poker sites helped fuel that craze, as did ESPN, which aired the World Series of Poker, showcasing the game for a mainstream audience, turning players into celebrities. I started playing a lot. I had a mortgage to pay off. I convinced myself that if I could get good at poker, I could help my family get ahead. Sometimes, I won big. There were weekends when I entered PokerStars tournaments, winning $80,000 on a $50 buy-in. Hundreds of thousands of dollars flowed in and out of my virtual accounts in those years, but I never cashed out. I just kept betting more.

BY THE TIME I WAS 35, I had spent roughly $20,000 a year on gambling, starting from the age of 10—I had lost more than $500,000, including the money I'd made from my wins. I was still gambling late into the night, playing at underground poker halls around town, sometimes coming home as late as sunrise the next day. I was about $35,000 in debt and was forced to ask my mom to help me pay it off. Gambling was affecting my work. It was affecting my relationship. I wasn't there for my son. Before long, I started missing mortgage payments. One day, my secret was out: the mortgage company contacted my girlfriend, letting her know we'd missed three payments. She was furious, wondering where all the money had gone. How could I have let things get so far out of control?

We split up in 2005. Our relationship had been rocky over the years, and it hit a breaking point when she found out about the gambling debt. I had become the only thing I didn't want to become—a bad partner, an absentee partner, just like my father. That's when I realized I needed help. I finally acknowledged that my gambling had ended the relationship and created severe financial issues. So I agreed to attend Gamblers Anonymous. I wanted to show both my ex and my mom that I was willing to get help. The program was once a week—a couple of hours of individual therapy combined with an hour of group.

I went cold turkey, and I hated it. I didn't really *want* to stop gambling. Every time I walked past a lottery machine, I thought to myself, *Maybe this time I can win millions and solve all my problems.* That's the thing about gambling. With other addictions, like alcohol and tobacco, using only causes harm. But gambling always presents an opportunity to reverse course, save yourself, get out of the hole.

I didn't gamble for a year. It was the first time I had practised any sort of abstinence. My debts were all settled. And in December of 2006, while on vacation with my buddies in Cuba, I met Julie, the woman who would become my second wife. I told her everything about my past. It was a huge relief to not hide anything. Julie and I got married in April of 2008 and had our first child later that year.

I stayed clean for the next three years, but I struggled. I didn't spend enough time with my son from my previous relationship. Then things went downhill. In 2010, my ex-girlfriend wanted to change the custody arrangement. Up until that point, we were doing a week on, a week off, splitting things 50-50. But my son wanted to live full time with his mother because I wasn't giving him enough attention.

One day, before work, I was at the station, waiting for my bus to arrive, when I got a message from an old buddy in the gambling world. He had just started a sports gambling website in the U.K. and wanted me to test it out. The online betting industry was worth some $15 billion by this point, with sites based all over the world, like PartyGaming in Gibraltar, Sportsbet in Australia and Betandwin in Austria.

The account came loaded with a $2,500 credit. I figured I was playing with house money—sort of. I only had to pay anything back if my losses took me below $2,500, which seemed like a good deal. But within two hours of getting the text, I had already bet the entire $2,500 credit, with 10 bets going on at the same time. As I waited on the outcomes, neurons firing in my brain, I momentarily forgot about the pain in my life. It was a fantastic, familiar feeling. By the next day, I had negative $500 in the account. I'd lost everything and then some.

That was my first taste of virtual sports betting, and I was hooked. With a virtual bankroll, it seemed like the money didn't even exist. It was just a number on a website. I didn't have to go to a bank to deposit cash. I didn't need to take out loans. I could just link up my credit card and pay for bets. Most importantly, I could hide everything from Julie, who works in banking and would be able to track any other gambling activity. Just like that, I blew three and a half years of abstinence.

My deceptive behaviour started up again. I siphoned off a percentage of my paycheque into a separate bank account, which I used to apply for credit cards and lines of credit. I went to a payday loan place, taking out as much as they would give me, which ended up being $600. Instead of putting that toward paying off my debt, I tried to double it, making bets to try to break even.

I managed to hide my gambling for another three years. All that time, I was under phenomenal stress. Everything became darker. My brain was always preoccupied, never present in the moment. I was always trying to figure out the next bet. People would talk to me, but I was never engaged in the conversation. I missed my kids growing up around me, which was heartbreaking.

In those years, I went on a few road trips to the States to see football games with a friend. Once, near Boston, during a game between the New England Patriots and Houston Texans, I bet $750 on Aaron Hernandez, one of the Patriots players, to score the first touchdown of the game. He did, running into the endzone about 40 feet from where we were sitting. The payout—more than $10,000—was one of the biggest rushes of my life. I got swept up in the moment, celebrating the windfall among the frenzied Patriots fans. But the losses outweighed the wins, of course. My debt had slowly been building, and I was in the pit for $17,500.

At that point, all I wanted was to break even, so in 2012 I put down a wager for US$17,500 on Super Bowl XLVII, between the Baltimore Ravens and the San Francisco 49ers. I figured I would stop after that. Well, I lost, sinking deeper into the hole for a total of US$35,000. I tried to keep it a secret from Julie, but she figured it out. On far too many family outings, I would be looking down at my phone, distracted, checking bets. The fact that everything was online made the problem worse. I could look down at my phone and disappear into another world.

When Julie caught on, I agreed to go to Rideauwood, an outpatient addiction treatment centre in Ottawa. We made a deal: she would get control of all our money, with full transparency, and I would go to Gamblers Anonymous once a week. I also saw a therapist. At Rideauwood, I met Jane, the head of the gambling program. She had blondish-white hair and a soft-spokenness that put everyone at ease. She was my saviour. She thought I had a “provider complex,” that I felt like I had to drive a nice car, have a big house, live a fancy lifestyle, much like my father. Apparently, I also had “champagne taste on a beer budget.” I just kept pissing that budget away, trying to make myself forget how shitty I was feeling, about my father leaving, about my relationships, about my addiction. We made some progress, and Jane suggested that I also check into Problem Gambling Services, an in-patient program in Windsor. I brushed her off. I thought I would be fine on my own.

BY 2017, Julie and I had three kids. I had built up some trust. She let me have a credit card again. Things were slowly going back to normal. That July, I received a panicked call in the middle of the night from one of my father’s many girlfriends. She said my father was in critical condition at a hospital in Puntarenas, Costa Rica, about a three-hour drive up the coast from where he lived in Manuel Antonio. He had a perforated bowel. The next morning, I flew down and went to see him in the hospital. We’d never had a great relationship and had barely even spoken in the last six years. And from what I could tell, he was going to die. He told me that I needed to take care of his house and a couple of rental properties in and around Manuel Antonio. Collect rent, get rid of squatters, stuff like that.

Every day, I saw my father during visiting hours at the hospital, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., then, in the afternoons, drove back to his properties in Manuel Antonio. During the drive back and forth, I stopped in Jaco, a little Atlantic City–style resort town with casinos and hotels. Overcome with grief and anger at my father’s situation, I started gambling again, playing poker at one of the hotels with a buy-in of $300. I blew $5,000 like it was nothing. After a few days, my father was discharged, and we took him back to his place. Within five hours of leaving the hospital, he died in my arms, just a couple of weeks before his 70th birthday. We held a memorial for him down there.

> Sports betting is more accessible than ever, seamlessly connected to phones and credit cards. Gamblers can lose their life savings without even getting out of bed.

When I came back to Ottawa, I struggled with the mourning process. I had a lot of resentment toward my father, and once again, I felt like he’d left me. When he died, I lost any hope of resolving our issues. I started drinking more, going to the bar near my house a couple of nights a week. Before long, I entered the bar’s football pool, which I won a couple of times, earning a couple hundred bucks a pop. Not much, but it was enough to draw me back in.

One of the bartenders introduced me to a bookie. When my inheritance started trickling in from my father’s estate, about $90,000 in total, I used some of it to gamble. I also asked my mother for about $25,000, telling her I needed it to cover my kid’s hockey fees, replace a car tire. I kept these things a secret from Julie. I always told the bookie not to let me get deeper than $1,500.

Of course, I was being naive. Bookies, casinos and gambling sites never tell bettors to stop. Instead, they prey on the vulnerable, their most reliable clients. I knew that if I continued gambling, I would lose my family, my house, everything. I contemplated suicide, thinking it was the only way to stop my gambling and that the life-insurance payout would support my family down the line. But I couldn’t cause so much trouble for them. Julie noticed a change in my behaviour. I was going to the bar three, four times a week. I was angry. I had no patience with my kids, lost interest in stuff I would usually enjoy, like playing men’s league hockey.

That’s when I made a big mistake—or maybe it was a cry for help. One day, in 2018, I was texting Julie and my bookie at the same time, dealing with multiple chats, when I accidentally texted Julie a list of my bets for that day. She wrote back angrily, asking what was happening. At first, I got defensive and proclaimed my innocence. But I knew the jig was up when she asked to come to my therapist appointment shortly after. I decided to come clean.

At that point, I owed $49,000 to the bookie, $26,000 on credit cards. Julie settled up with the bookie and told him never to contact me again. The whole thing put a big strain on our finances—we had to refinance our house to cover the debts—and I had to borrow money from my mom. In September of 2018, I finally admitted myself to the three-week in-patient gambling treatment program in Windsor that Jane had suggested, which thankfully was covered by OHIP. When I arrived, they put all my clothing into a dryer to make sure I didn't bring in any contraband or electronics. There was no access to the outside world—no phones, no TVs. We had to be at the table when meals were served, promptly at 7 a.m., 11:45 a.m. and 6:45 p.m.

During my time there, I had one-on-ones with therapists and group sessions. The program saved me. It forced me to take a three-week break from my life: no bills, no bookies, no nothing, just dealing with myself. The staff there taught us that it takes time to break a habit, to rewire the neural pathways that control our behaviour. We learned about dopamine spikes and subconscious triggers, including big swings of emotion. I came to realize that when I had thoughts of abandonment related to my father, I used gambling to distract from those feelings. Armed with a better understanding of the addiction, and deprived of access to cash, bookies and sports betting sites, it was relatively easy to get control of my habit.

I HAVEN'T GAMBLED since August of 2018. I won't flip a coin, play rock-paper-scissors. If there's a 50-50 draw at work, I politely decline to participate. When I feel an urge to gamble, I text Julie to let her know I'm thinking of her. It helps keep me accountable. But it's getting harder and harder, especially with so many enticing advertisements. One campaign for BetMGM features hockey greats like Connor McDavid and Wayne Gretzky. The ads target broad swaths of hockey fans, making betting seem cool, fun, heroic. Everyone is a winner. The truth is that these places only exist because the gamblers *aren't* winning. The money is flowing in one direction.

Before 2021, when Pro-Line and horse racing were the only two legal forms of sports betting in Canada, placing single-game bets was a bit more difficult. I had to either find a bookie and pay them off in cash or register with a foreign sports betting site. At the time, Canadians were spending $14 billion annually on illegal gambling operations and offshore betting websites, playing through sportsbooks.

The Canadian government wanted a piece of the action. So, in 2021, it passed Bill C-218, removing the ban on single-game sports betting, allowing provinces to create their own regulatory authorities. Ontario didn't waste any time. The province set up a regulatory authority, iGaming Ontario, to oversee the burgeoning industry. By the spring of 2022, there were dozens of sportsbooks registered in the province—big-name international players like Bet365, PointsBet and DraftKings, along with new Ontario-based companies like theScore Bet and BetRivers.

Business was decent at the start. Naturally, professional sports franchises and broadcasters leapt into bed with betting companies. Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, which owns the Maple Leafs and Raptors, inked a multi-year deal with PointsBet Canada. And TSN, one of Canada's biggest sports broadcasters, partnered with the U.S.-based FanDuel. From that point forward, it was virtually impossible to watch a sporting event in Ontario without being inundated by sports betting propaganda. The industry produced $162 million in revenues in Ontario in its first three months of operation.

It could get much bigger. Alberta, which has been fairly cautious in its approach to sports betting, announced that it will allow two companies to enter the industry. Deloitte Canada estimates that the market resulting from single-event sports betting in Canada could grow close to $28 billion within five years. A lot of gamblers will be able to stay within their limits. But what about the people like me, who struggle with gambling addiction? In Canada, more than 300,000 people are at severe or moderate risk of gambling-related problems, according to a recent study by Statistics Canada.

In the digital age, sports betting is more accessible than ever. It's in the palm of your hand, seamlessly connected to your phone and credit cards. Gamblers can bet—and lose—their life savings without even getting out of bed. Canadians need to be aware of the consequences. I would like to see more contrast advertising, like the kind that exists for the alcohol and tobacco industries. Cigarette cartons are covered in disturbing images of people with cancer. MADD had those macabre commercials dramatizing the results of drinking and driving. The sports betting industry needs something similar—in particular, showing how compulsive gambling can lead to suicide: problem gamblers are more likely to attempt suicide than people with other addictions, at a rate of one in five.

In the U.K., they're already trying to curtail sports betting advertising. A recent Public Health England study estimated that more than 409 suicides a year in England were associated with problem gambling. The nation's biggest gambling companies have also agreed to ban betting commercials during sporting events. Ads featuring athletes are prohibited. Other countries, like Spain and Italy, have banned nearly all gambling ads. Canada should follow the leads of our friends across the Atlantic—before it's too late.

I have four kids in total. My oldest, who's 21, recently started helping me coach my daughter's basketball team. The rest of my kids, from my second marriage, are 14, 12 and 10. We live in a nice house in Orléans, with a pool and a hot tub, not far from my mother's place. I'm the goalie coach and statistician for my 14-year-old son's hockey team. My relationship with Julie is great. Last year, we spent two weeks in Italy, something I could never have imagined doing while I was in the throes of my addiction, with my finances and focus channelled elsewhere.

Recently, my 14-year-old son asked whether he could place a $5 bet on the Super Bowl, in a pool with his friends from school. I thought about it for a moment. Then I said yes. I told him if it ever got to the point where he couldn't stop, he could always come talk to me. I want to keep our communication open. I guess, in that way, I'm nothing like my father. ■

A SPECIAL INTEREST SECTION BY MEDIAPLANET

Access to Immunotherapy for Hard-to-Treat Lymphoma Improving

Now widely available across Canada as a third-line treatment for B-cell lymphomas, CAR T focus now on second-line treatment.

Anne Papmehl

Researchers in cancer medicine have been studying immunotherapies for decades. One form of immunotherapy is stem cell transplants, which have been the standard of care in many types of blood cancers, such as high-risk leukemias, myeloma, and lymphoma, especially where patients haven't responded to chemotherapy treatment.

Chimeric antigen receptor therapy (CAR T) is a newer form of immunotherapy that has shown increased survival and cure rates when used as a treatment in patients with relapsed or unresponsive B-cell lymphomas. “We've seen long-term survival in about 40 per cent of those patients, which is far superior to the long-held gold standard of chemotherapy followed by stem cell transplant,” says Dr. John Kuruvilla, a hematologist in the Division of Medical Oncology and Hematology at Princess Margaret Hospital.

Using patients' own T-cells to fight cancer

CAR T therapy involves collecting T cells (blood lymphocytes) from the patient, sending them to a lab where they're genetically modified to target specific cancer markers, and then infusing them back into the patient's body. Prior to the infusion, patients are prepared with a treatment called lymphodepletion with a standard dose of chemotherapy to ensure the right environment for those cells to expand, multiply, and target the cancer cells.

“Getting to where we are today with CAR T therapy has taken decades of work in the lab, well-designed studies, and clinical trials with hundreds of patients,” says Dr. Kuruvilla. One major challenge was overcoming the tendency of the rapidly growing T cells to cause a cytokine storm in the patient — an intense immune activation resulting in systemic inflammation that could cause extreme illness or even death. “Over time, we learned how to manage that safely without compromising the potential effectiveness of the treatment,” says Dr. Kuruvilla.

Among the first genetically engineered cell therapies

As a third-line cancer treatment for certain types of lymphoma, CAR T has been more widely approved and funded for patients over the last few years in Canada. Initially available only in Ontario, Quebec, and Alberta, there's now a CAR T treatment centre in nearly every province. Recent clinical trial data shows that CAR T also offers significant promise as a second-line therapy, however, this is not currently available to patients in Canada. “We're hoping it will soon be funded as a second-line treatment, particularly in patients with the highest risk aggressive B-cell lymphomas who don't receive remission with their first treatment or whose cancer starts to grow within a year of completion of treatment,” says Dr. Kuruvilla.

Having more CAR T treatment centres across Canada is a step in the right direction, according to Sabrina Hanna, Chief Innovation Officer at the cancer collaborative. “It's a huge improvement in that a very sick patient from B.C. eventually won't have to travel to Ontario for treatment, but we're still not in a place where it's equitable for all patients, as many still have to travel from their communities to the larger centres.” Hanna would like to see CAR T funded as an earlier treatment line when patients are less sick, have fewer comorbidities, and have a chance at a better outcome. “Quality of life is important and, while with CAR T the patient still has to go through the lymphodepletion process, the side effects are less severe, so patient preferences and needs should be taken into account when making these types of policy decisions,” she says. ■

> **Getting to where we are today with CAR T therapy has taken decades of work in the lab, well-designed studies, and clinical trials with hundreds of patients.**

Learn more about whether CAR T therapy is a suitable option for you by visiting **cancercolab.ca**.

thecancercollaborative

This article was brought to you by one of Canada's leading research-based pharmaceutical companies.

Strategic Account Manager: **Meredith Burt** Strategic Account Director: **Jessica Golyatov** Content Strategist: **Nicole Kansakar** Country Manager: **Nina Theodorlis** Production Lead: **Michael Taylor** Creative Lead: **Kylie Armishaw** Web Editor: **Christina Morgan** Digital Media Coordinator: **Kristen Neals** Digital Traffic Strategist: **Karm Rathod** All images are from Getty Images unless otherwise credited. This section was created by Mediaplanet and did not involve Maclean's Magazine or its editorial departments. Send all inquiries to **ca.editorial@mediaplanet.com**.

A VIOLENT PAST Ashley Wadsworth was unaware of Jack Sepple's criminal background, even as she flew around the world to be with him

A DEADLY LOVE

Ashley Wadsworth spent years building an online romance with a young Englishman. Months after they met in person, he killed her—and her family learned of his dark past. Why did no one stop him?

BY CARLY LEWIS

At 12 years old, Ashley Wadsworth didn't yet have a smartphone. She didn't need one, figured her mother, with a close-knit community of family and friends in Vernon, a small city in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley. But she did use the family laptop to see what her friends were posting to social media. Among her peers, it wasn't seen as bold to add friends of friends on a whim, or to message a cute stranger to say hi. Wadsworth and her friends mingled confidently online the way previous generations might have at the mall. That's how, in 2015, Wadsworth became Facebook friends with a 16-year-old English teenager named Jack Sepple, after spotting him on a mutual acquaintance's page. Wadsworth had always been curious about the wider world, and Sepple offered a window onto faraway places—even if that place was only Chelmsford, a city of about 180,000 people in Essex, an hour northeast of London.

Wadsworth was bright and gregarious. She played ringette, tennis and the clarinet. At school, she went out of her way to befriend international students, knowing they might feel lonely, so far away from home. Sepple, by contrast, was withdrawn. He didn't have a thriving social life, and his biggest hobby seemed to be social media, but Wadsworth liked his scrappy charm. Their three-and-a-half-year age gap was mitigated by distance, and the fact that Sepple also lived at home with his family.

At first the pair were more like pen pals, confidantes whose daily exchanges refreshed the scenery of each other's lives. Within a few months, Wadsworth began mentioning Sepple to her mother, Christy Gendron, as well as her sister, Hailey, and her father, Kenneth, who lived nearby with his wife. Gendron was cautious about the burgeoning relationship, but felt more comfortable after Sepple sent photos of himself. They seemed to prove he was who he said he was: a bored teenager who, like so many of his generation, socialized largely online.

Gendron thought the interest would fade, but the connection grew from confidantes to crushes. Sepple sent Wadsworth gifts: clothing, money, teddy bears, jewellery, a handbag. They were on and off, with periods of no communication. When they were on, Sepple's face became a regular presence in the Wadsworth home—

Gendron might look up from cooking dinner to see him on a screen, and offer a warm "Hi, Jack." With an eight-hour time difference, Wadsworth woke before dawn to talk to Sepple, who stayed up late into the night on his end. "She had this connection with him that nobody understood," says Tianna Kowalchuk, a close friend of Wadsworth's. Their long conversations centred on the same daydream: one day they'd finally meet. In 2018, Wadsworth started asking her mother if she could visit Sepple. The answer, of course, was no—at the time, she was only 15.

As in any teenage entanglement, the pair occasionally fought, usually about one thing: Sepple's fears that Wadsworth had crushes on teen boys in Vernon. At times, conflict escalated to the point that Wadsworth would block Sepple online; in return, he'd make new accounts to reach her, or send angry messages to her sister and friends, knowing they'd get her attention. To some of Wadsworth's friends, Sepple's adoration looked like obsession. She insisted that he was simply a passionate person, and that he had a good heart.

In October of 2018—when Sepple was nearly 20 and Wadsworth was 16—he revealed a new addition to his growing tattoo collection: Wadsworth's first name, inked on his arm in elaborate cursive, an emblem of his devotion. Gendron thought it was extreme, and told her daughter she wasn't allowed to reciprocate with her own. "Mom," she responded, "I would never."

As infatuated as she'd become, Wadsworth had a fun and busy life offline. She loved to camp and hike with friends, and embark on muddy off-roading adventures with Kowalchuk. On Snapchat she posted videos with funny filters, like a halo of hearts over her head as she bobbed along to the radio in the car. In another, recorded when she was 15, she sings the words to "Hallelujah," zooming in and out on her blue eyes and long eyelashes, comedically pursing her lips to admit she missed a note. To fundraise for their high school graduation, she and Kowalchuk sold raffle tickets at local grocery stores, selling every last one. Photos from the June 2020 ceremony show Wadsworth and her family smiling with balloons, a bouquet of congratulatory flowers nestled in Wadsworth's arms.

> TO SOME, SEPPLE'S ADORATION BEGAN TO LOOK LIKE OBSESSION. WADSWORTH INSISTED HE WAS SIMPLY A PASSIONATE PERSON.

At the same time, her relationship with Sepple was becoming more tumultuous. Wadsworth began to hide aspects of it from her mother—though not totally from her friends. In 2018, Sepple dragged a knife across his tattoo of Wadsworth's name, enraged during one of their fights. "She thought it was messed up," says Kowalchuk. "It was his deranged way of professing his love to her." And though Sepple was intensely jealous at the idea Wadsworth might be seeing boys in Vernon, he was dating women in Chelmsford. When Wadsworth was 18, in 2020, she began receiving calls from some, during their own fights with Sepple. They hoped that she—as his favourite, which he'd made clear to them—could calm him down. Once, out with Kowalchuk, Wadsworth got a call from a woman saying Sepple wouldn't let her leave his house. "It was almost like she had seen this before," remembers Kowalchuk. "It seemed like this was a regular thing. She told him to stop acting crazy."

Looking back, one might question why Wadsworth didn't cut ties then. Sepple was a skilled manipulator, and she wanted to be in love. As a teenage girl, Wadsworth did not yet understand his behaviour as abusive—problematic, yes, but without a vocabulary for abuse there was no real framework of explanation. Kowalchuk often told Wadsworth to get rid of him, but the couple always reconciled. His apologies seemed heartfelt, and they agreed things would be perfect when they could be in the same place. "He would apologize or use gifts as a way to lure her back," says Kowalchuk. Wadsworth didn't know how much worse he would become.

As soon as she could legally work, Wadsworth started racking up hours at part-time jobs—McDonald's, Burger King, a Chinese restaurant called Asian Avenue, Home Depot, and a clothing store called Red Bag. One of her first purchases was an iPad of her own, freeing her from the household laptop.

In 2020, Wadsworth deferred her enrolment to Thompson Rivers University. Because of the pandemic, courses were still being held on Zoom, and she craved a campus community. It was also the perfect opportunity to travel to England. She'd graduated high school, had money in the bank and couldn't be stopped by her parents' stern reminders that she was a child. She was an adult now and could do what she wanted. She got a six-month tourist visa and, on November 12, 2021, at age 19, said goodbye to her family and flew to London, her first time travelling alone. From her airplane seat, she posted a Snapchat, blowing her loved ones a kiss. "I'm in my plane," she said, excitedly inventorying the amenities on her first transatlantic flight. "It's huge!"

The next day, the pair were finally together. Wadsworth changed her Facebook picture to a shot of her and Sepple, cheek-to-cheek in the arrivals area at London Gatwick airport. Alongside Sepple, Wadsworth's innocent appearance was striking—he was tough-looking, heavily tattooed with bloated eyes and a surly demeanour. She struck a demure contrast, with soft brown hair and a floral-patterned mask pulled below her chin. Friends and family left hearts and smiley-face emojis in the comments. After so many years pining, Wadsworth seemed content.

FOR A MOMENT, it appeared a sweet love story, a rare romantic risk that paid off. Wadsworth moved into Sepple's home, a rowhouse in a public-housing complex in northwest Chelmsford, where he'd lived since 2020. The neighbourhood itself has a rough reputation, but they explored Chelmsford's more genteel districts. Wadsworth posted Facebook photos of their travels—in one, they're hugging outside a church, autumn leaves strewn on the ground, both grinning so hard it makes their cheeks rounder. They got a kitten and named it Winston. When Wadsworth FaceTimed her family back home, she beamed—Sepple, too, seemed cheerful.

In many ways, Sepple was the man Wadsworth had known him to be during those years online. He could be loving and warm, showering her with compliments, never saying no to a sentimental selfie. He could also be volatile, with a vicious temper. The couple spent all day together, every day. On a tourist visa, Wadsworth couldn't work, and Sepple was unemployed, collecting social assistance and sometimes being supported by his mother, Tracy Dalton, who lived nearby. He was close with her and his sister, Nadia, but saw few other people. (His father, with whom he had a strained relationship, died in 2019, and he was estranged from his brother, Jordan.) He seemed to have no friends or social life—suddenly, neither did Wadsworth. Within weeks, her world shrank further, as Sepple stopped wanting to go for walks, opting instead to stay inside, smoke weed and play Xbox.

It was a dramatic departure from Wadsworth's vibrant life at home. In Chelmsford, Sepple didn't even like Wadsworth chatting with the neighbours.

In her late teens, still in British Columbia, Wadsworth had become interested in religion, choosing to be baptized into the local Mormon church. Her family wasn't particularly religious, and Wadsworth's flirtation with faith—though she was never devout—seemed an example of restless, youthful soul-searching. "She read the Book of Mormon front to back," says Kowalchuk. "Something clicked inside of her."

Before she left Canada, a friend from the church connected Wadsworth with some American missionaries around her age, who would be in Chelmsford at the same time. When Wadsworth arrived she told Sepple she wanted to make plans with them, but he didn't approve, and wouldn't let her attend Sunday services. But Wadsworth was getting lonely, and bored. So despite their proximity, she developed a friendship with the missionaries through text messages. To keep Sepple from finding out, she got in the habit of deleting her WhatsApp history, knowing he spied on her phone.

BETTER DAYS
A bubbly, goofy, fun-loving teenager, Ashley Wadsworth had a full life in small-town British Columbia

Her new friends could tell that Sepple was controlling. "I remember saying, 'Ashley, don't you think you deserve better than that?'" recalls one friend after he forbade her from joining them on a road trip. "And she was like, 'Oh, I know I do, I just want to make him happy." Another says that in hindsight, "there was more going on than Ashley was telling us."

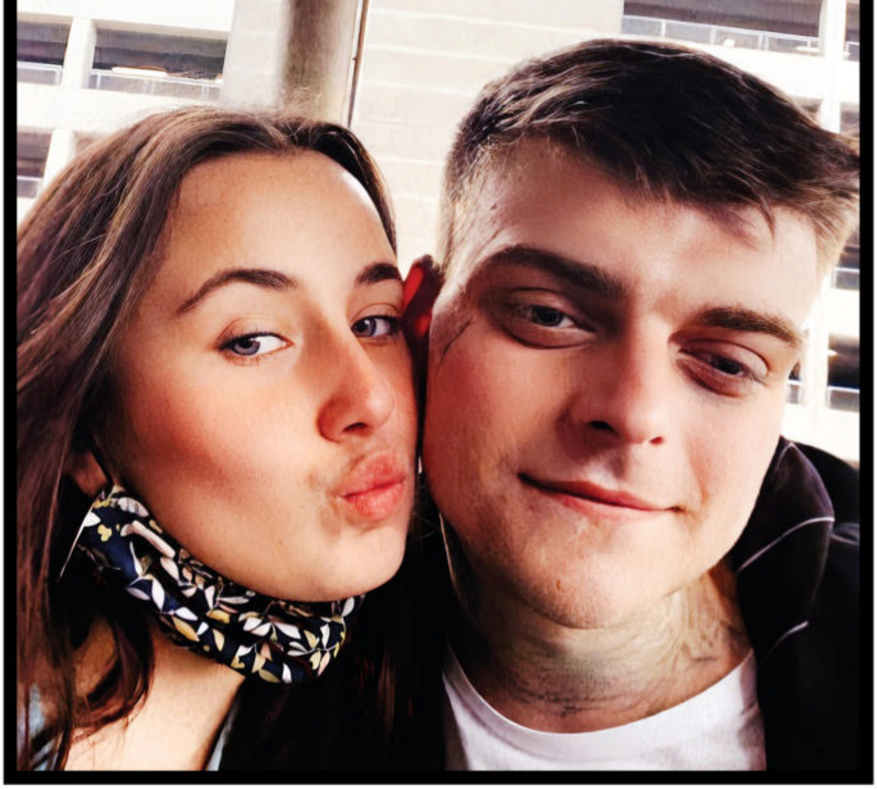
That included physical violence. On Boxing Day, six weeks after Wadsworth arrived, Sepple texted his mother saying he'd "smacked" Wadsworth because he found out she had blocked two British numbers on her phone, years ago. He assumed the numbers belonged to other men. "That's no reason to lay a hand on her," Dalton texted back. His psychological problems, it was increasingly obvious, were more deep-seated than Wadsworth had known. She'd been aware of Sepple's history of self-harm—when he got angry or wanted his girlfriends to console him, he'd cut himself, deeply enough to bleed but never to seriously injure. He also regularly took an anti-anxiety medication. Wadsworth felt compelled to stick by his side. The day after Boxing Day, she changed her Facebook picture to a photo of Sepple with his arm around her, both of them smiling, and captioned it "My bestie" with a red heart.

Around the same time, she began keeping a secret Snapchat folder to document her bruises. Wadsworth didn't hide the abuse from her sister, but threatened to cut communication with Hailey if she told their mom. "She didn't want us to hate him," says Hailey.

In late December of 2021, Sepple attempted suicide, swallowing a stockpile of his anti-anxiety medication. Wadsworth called an ambulance, which rushed him to hospital, where he was treated for the overdose. Wadsworth was appointed his caregiver, entrusted with administering his medication safely—a nurse gave her a lockbox to store the pills. Wadsworth didn't tell her mom, or her friends, but Hailey let it slip. Gendron was worried, and said Wadsworth should come home. Wadsworth insisted he would get better.

In early January, Sepple smashed a thick glass beer mug over Wadsworth's head. Wadsworth FaceTimed her sister, crying as Sepple made her clean up the shards. In the background, Sepple paced back and forth, screaming and clenching his teeth. Hailey begged her sister to fly home, to no avail.

Weeks later, Sepple's mom, Tracy Dalton, and her husband, Ricky, organized a family trip to Rye, a small coastal town, to reset



FIRST MEETING Wadsworth and Sepple in November of 2021 at London Gatwick airport, moments after her arrival in England

the tone after Sepple's suicide attempt. They ate in pubs and toured the bucolic English countryside—Sepple's psychological issues shrouded from onlookers, who would have seen a jovial family strolling cobblestone roads and ordering dessert, posing for pictures with their arms around each other. Gendron was relieved when she saw her daughter's photos—maybe things had indeed improved.

The reset was short-lived. Soon after returning home, Sepple grew furious when he discovered years-old messages on Wadsworth's phone from a young man in Canada, whom Sepple assumed she was interested in. He demanded her social media passwords, and she complied.

During a fight at the end of January, Sepple again hit Wadsworth, and threw a candle and a television remote at her while she was on FaceTime with Hailey, who yet again begged her sister to come home. Wadsworth agreed, but soon backtracked—she believed that somewhere inside the monstrous version of him was the charming boy she'd woken up early to talk to all those years ago. She prayed that time, or medication, or her love would heal him.

Sepple seemed to have some understanding of the cycle he'd trapped Wadsworth in—accusing her of disloyalty, assaulting her, then apologizing, only to do it all over again. "She's the only person I've ever truly loved," he wrote to his mother in that Boxing Day exchange. "But I'm ruining it and it's killing me inside." On January 29, he texted his mom to say Wadsworth should go home. "Running away is not the answer," replied Dalton. "Relationships are hard work, and it takes effort, patience and love to stay together." But, she added, "if you want her to go I understand."

On January 30, Wadsworth changed her Facebook photo to a shot of her and Sepple, smiling on a sunny day. That evening, Sepple wrote to his sister: "I'm obsessed with Ashley's past."

ON THE MORNING of February 1, Sepple was angry again. Convinced as ever that Wadsworth could be sneaking around on him—despite his close watch on her every move—he had gone through the contents of her phone.

Just before 8 a.m., the couple's next-door neighbour, Helen Burtenshaw, heard Wadsworth's screams through their shared wall. Moments later, Wadsworth appeared at her door, barefoot; when the older woman opened it, she saw Wadsworth crying, blood dripping from a cut on her palm. She said Sepple had hit her and destroyed her phone. He'd thrown their kitten against the wall. She worried he was going to kill her, but asked Burtenshaw not to call police, possibly fearing he might hurt himself if things escalated, or that he'd be sent to jail. Burtenshaw agreed, but asked Wadsworth to come along to a medical appointment she had that morning, rather than go back home. Wadsworth declined, so Burtenshaw went next door herself—alone—to reason with Sepple. He apologized, and she left.

Around 9 a.m., another neighbour, Lucy, brought Sepple a package that was mistakenly delivered to her address. Sepple wouldn't fully open the door—Lucy didn't think much of it; she knew Sepple to be a brooding, unfriendly young man who could seem paranoid.

Around that time, Wadsworth used Sepple's phone to call her family in Vernon, where it was midnight. She told them she wanted to come home. Gendron, finally in the know because Hailey had broken down and told her, was terrified. Then and there, the Wadsworths booked a flight leaving in two days. Sepple agreed to take Wadsworth for a pre-flight COVID test, then to the airport. Gendron told her daughter to leave and go straight to the airport if Sepple exploded again, and told Sepple she'd call the cops if he hurt Wadsworth further. Hailey messaged Sepple's mother, who said she couldn't help because she was at the airport herself, unrelatedly. She told Hailey, "As soon as Ashley leaves he's gonna kill himself." When Wadsworth and her family disconnected for the last time, it was around 3 a.m. in Vernon; in Chelmsford, 11 a.m. Gendron now believes this is when Sepple decided to kill her daughter.

Minutes later, Sepple messaged his mother on WhatsApp: "I beat up Ashley really bad." Dalton responded, "Is she hurt? Jack why?" Fourteen minutes later he replied, "She thinks she broke her arm. I picked her up and threw her on the ground, and punched her and ripped her all around the lounge." According to phone records, Dalton didn't respond.

From 11:22 a.m. to 12:38 p.m., Wadsworth sent panicked messages—using Sepple's phone—to family and friends in Vernon, where it was the middle of the night, as well as to her church acquaintances in Chelmsford. "It's Ashley," she wrote to one friend. "I need your help. It's an emergency. Please." She sent similar messages to others, including Jamie, a

20-year-old Mormon who was in Chelmsford on a missionary trip. No one received them until hours later.

At some point between 12:38 and 12:45 p.m., Sepple strangled Wadsworth. Then he went to the kitchen, selected an 11.5-centimetre knife, and returned to the bedroom. He stabbed her at least 90 times in the chest and abdomen.

When Wadsworth's family woke up in Vernon, they saw the barrage of messages that had pinged their phones and scrambled to make contact. They called Jamie and asked her to go to the house, which she did, with another friend and two men from the church, hoping to move Wadsworth to a safe location. There was no answer. They called the police and left.

In Vernon, Kowalchuk could see that someone was active on the Facebook account Wadsworth had used to message her—it was Sepple, pretending to be Wadsworth, messaging some of Wadsworth's other friends saying she'd simply wanted help finding a COVID test and no longer needed assistance. Kowalchuk kept messaging, desperate for a response. Sepple went about his day, ignoring her, as he did the Wadsworths' messages. Investigators later found blood on an Xbox controller, suggesting he played video games.

> THE WADSWORTHS LISTENED IN STUNNED SILENCE AS THE PROSECUTOR READ ALOUD SEPPLE'S LONG RECORD OF VIOLENCE

Later that day, he changed his Facebook picture to a photo of himself and Ashley at Gatwick months earlier, and captioned it "Forever Mine." In the bedroom, he recorded a video message—never sent—for Wadsworth's sister. Breathing heavily, with Wadsworth's body visible in the frame, he said that he loved her, and was sorry. "Couldn't ever let you leave," he said, addressing her body. "My head was fucked . . . I'm so sorry, Hailey, for taking your sister."

After recording the video, he made small, superficial stab wounds on his own chest, which prosecutors believe may have been intended to lay the groundwork for a self-defence claim. Sepple's final communication before police arrived was with his sister. They video chatted around 4 p.m. "Nadia, I've killed Ashley," he said, then pointed the phone's camera at Wadsworth's body. The call ended then, when two police officers, summoned by Jamie's call 10 minutes prior, burst through the front door. The officers who attended the scene described Sepple as calm.

AFTER THE MURDER, Sepple was remanded to Chelmsford Prison. At some point, he scrawled a chaotic and non-linear statement on the front and back of a list of facility rules, claiming he was high during the murder. It also read, in part, that he'd "stabbed the life out of her to prove I fucking own her." When he was arrested, he told police he'd "gone psychotic." Despite these claims, toxicology reports found only cannabis and a therapeutic dose of his anti-anxiety medication in his system, and a psychiatric assessment determined him fit to plead and stand trial. In September of 2022, with the evidence—including his video-recorded confession—overwhelmingly stacked against him, he entered a guilty plea. A sentencing hearing was scheduled for October. (I attempted repeatedly over five months to reach Sepple. The request was processed by HM Prison and Probation Service, but Sepple did not respond.)

Until the sentencing date, Gendron and Dalton kept in touch. Wadsworth's mother knew that Dalton, too, was experiencing a form of grief, grappling with the weight of her son's crime. And she'd been kind to their daughter, telling her over video chat that she couldn't wait for her to arrive in Chelmsford, that she'd gotten her slippers and a robe and a teacup. The pair planned to meet in person when the Wadsworths arrived in Chelmsford for the sentencing hearing.

That changed on October 10, 2022. At Chelmsford Crown Court, packed with journalists and observers, the Wadsworths listened in stunned silence as prosecuting counsel Simon Spence read aloud Sepple's years-long criminal background—a relentless roll call of violence, controlling behaviour, harassment and terrifying outbursts dating back to his youth.

In 2014, when he was only 15, Sepple met a 14-year-old girl online. He took naked photos of the girl without permission, and when she broke up with him, hacked into her Facebook account, posting the images for all to see. She filed a restraining order. A month later, he breached the order by requesting to follow the victim on Instagram. That same year, Sepple got into an argument with his mother about his Xbox and shoved her to the floor, before tearing a door off its hinges.

In the following March, he breached the restraining order again, sending another Instagram request. When the restraining order expired in 2017, Sepple waited all of six minutes before contacting the victim. Like with Wadsworth, he also tried reaching the victim through her friends. The following January he sent her a message that read, "please reply, you are never going to get rid of me, even if I have to go to prison over you. I'll see you soon, and I will turn up wherever you live." He served a suspended detention sentence.

In July of 2018, his mother called an ambulance after Sepple cut his arm. Angry at her for involving paramedics, he again damaged a door in her home. He was sentenced to eight weeks in a Young Offender institution, and a restraining order was filed by the court on Dalton's behalf.

That September, there was another breach of the restraining order—he made a new Instagram account to contact his victim after she'd blocked him—which resulted in a detention sentence. The following month, he pleaded guilty to trying to break into a supported-living facility, and received a 21-day sentence.

In March of 2020, Sepple met a woman on Facebook. They moved in together quickly, but she eventually found him to be "jealous" and "unpredictable." When she tried to break up, he put his hand around her throat and locked her inside the house. After she escaped through a window, he bombarded her with messages and phone calls. (She did not press charges.)

Months prior, he'd locked a different woman inside his home. For that Sepple was charged with false imprisonment, common assault and coercive or controlling behaviour. Because the victim did not attend the trial hearing to provide evidence, he couldn't be convicted, but a non-conviction restraining order was filed, bringing his total number of restraining orders to three.

While the courts and police had ample evidence of Sepple's violent criminal past, there was more. An additional ex-girlfriend shared a photo with me that Sepple had sent to her around 2018—in which he is holding a knife to his own throat, blood dripping from a shallow cut he'd made. An accompanying text message read, "I am sad." During their relationship, says the woman, Sepple openly wondered what it would be like to kill someone. He could be lovely, she says, but he smashed two of her phones and once threatened her with a knife.

One of Sepple's former middle school classmates told me Sepple was often in trouble for throwing tables and being generally aggressive. Another former classmate, who attended elementary school with Sepple, recalls him as a funny, boisterous kid—but with a dark side, evident even as a child. "He had a lot of love to give," he says, "but he was very quick to snap or lose his head." Once, when the friend beat Sepple in a video game, Sepple ran to the kitchen and began slicing his wrists: "His mother had to wrestle the knife from him." The pair drifted apart when Sepple attended CSS Heybridge, a school for at-risk students who have difficulty in conventional schools. A former teacher recalls that there, Sepple was intimidating, especially with female staff members. "But," the teacher added, "he could be charming too."

Sepple was sentenced to life in prison, and must wait 23 and a half years before being considered for parole. Through lawyers, Sepple delivered an apology note to Wadsworth's family, which read, in part, "It's no excuse, but I know my intrusive thoughts have a big effect on my thinking and my actions." Wadsworth's mother says even his apology was manipulative; her father read it, then let his copy fall from his hands, leaving it on the courtroom table.

With sentencing in the rearview, the Wadsworths can't stop replaying visions of what-ifs in their minds—most agonizingly, what if they, or their daughter, had known the extent of Sepple's history? In a note to the Wadsworth family sent after the murder, Sepple's estranged brother described him as "a sick, twisted, evil individual."

Gendron doesn't blame Sepple's family, but does question why they protected their son by way of silence. "She didn't take the knife and kill Ashley," says Gendron of Sepple's mother. "I know that. I don't think she thought he would murder her. But if your child has mental-health issues, and they attempt suicide, and show signs of violence in their relationship, intervene. It's a lesson I have to live with every day." (Dalton did not respond to repeated interview requests; her husband, Sepple's stepfather Ricky, declined to comment.)

AT WHAT POINT DOES A PROVABLY VIOLENT PERSON LOSE THEIR RIGHT TO ANONYMITY? WHY SHOULD A PATTERN OF VIOLENCE BE HIDDEN?

Wadsworth's father asks more direct questions: at what point does a repeatedly violent person lose the right to anonymity? Why do privacy laws protect their secrets, when transparency could save lives? The Wadsworths googled Sepple before their daughter went to England. Nothing came up. "I understand that takes away from privacy," he says. "But if you're a violent serial offender, maybe you shouldn't have that right."

THE U.K.'S DOMESTIC Violence Disclosure Scheme, known as Clare's Law, is designed to deal with exactly this by permitting police to disclose the criminal history of convicted abusers if they believe potential victims are at risk. The law is named after Clare Wood, an English woman who, in 2009, was killed by her partner, a man police knew to be violent—he'd served prison sentences for harassment and restraining a woman at knifepoint.

Clare's Law can work in two ways: "the right to ask," through which applicants request information, and "the right to know." (The latter is less commonly used—in these cases, police proactively disclose a dangerous person's past to an interested party, like the new partner of a known offender.)

In theory, Clare's Law creates the kind of transparency that might prevent someone like Wadsworth from entering a dangerous relationship. In practice, it's more complicated. In 2021, the *Guardian* reported that 375 out of 1,609 "right to ask" responses in England took longer than 35 days. Compounding the delays was a significant increase in applications—in 2018, there were 3,479 requests; by 2020, there were 8,438. The same *Guardian* story reported that Essex police, the force overseeing Chelmsford, approved only seven per cent of Clare's Law requests in 2020—36 out of 529. (Applications can be rejected for several reasons, including when police feel the applicant is not close enough to either party in the relationship.)

Wadsworth's mother says that if she'd been aware of it, she would have made a request before her daughter left Canada—under Britain's law, information is available to non-citizens. "Maybe Ashley herself wouldn't have applied, because she loved him, but if I'd known I absolutely would have," says Gendron.

In Canada, Clare's Law is only in force in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and both have struggled to provide information in a timely manner—as of last year, some applicants in Alberta had been waiting more than three months for information, though the province's Justice Ministry announced last June that it had finally cleared a backlog of 180 requests, approving 75 per cent of them. Newfoundland and Labrador passed the law in its House of Assembly in 2019. It is expected to be proclaimed

ROWN COURT
HELMSFORD

RECKONING Ashley Wadsworth's mother, Christy Gendron, and father, Kenneth, attending Jack Sepple's sentencing hearing

Photograph by Phil Harris/Mirrorpix

this summer, with regulations now being drafted after repeated delays. In Ontario, MPP Jennie Stevens proposed Clare's Law in a private member's bill in 2021, but a motion has only just been introduced.

The main impediment is privacy legislation. Until 2021, police could not disclose criminal records without a perpetrator's consent. After consultation with the federal government and Canada's privacy commissioner, the RCMP amended its regulations. The RCMP, and any municipal or other force in Canada, can now share records without violating the Privacy Act in provinces where Clare's Law has been passed and proclaimed.

Even with Clare's Law, many would still not easily extricate themselves from abuse. But some might, and importantly, it could help applicants avoid deepening their relationships with abusers in the first place. This would be a critical intervention given that rates of intimate-partner violence against women have been rising for nearly a decade in Canada, increasing by almost 20 per cent since 2014. According to the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, the number of women and girls killed by a male accused in 2022 increased by 27 per cent compared to 2019—one woman or girl is killed every 48 hours in Canada. "Canada has fallen flat in addressing domestic violence," says Andrea Silverstone, CEO of Calgary-based survivor advocacy organization Sagesse.

The risk of domestic homicide is highest when a partner leaves or is about to leave. In court, Judge Edward Murray determined that Sepple's imminent loss of control over Wadsworth led to his decision to murder her. Disclosures provided by Clare's Law could help victims make a safe exit plan, a process that often requires time, strategy and support.

Sepple's violence was not without warning signs—some of them glaring, even to Wadsworth. In March of 2021, eight months before Wadsworth left home, Sepple sent her a 26-second voice message, furious because he knew Kowalchuk had been saying she didn't like him. In the clip, he sounds unhinged. Amid a stream of horrifying guttural yowls, he says, referring to Kowalchuk, "I'm going to kill her. I'm going to fucking murder her." Wadsworth still went to Chelmsford.

"Women are socialized to think we are the fixers, the peacemakers," says lawyer Pamela Cross, a legal expert on violence against women. Indeed, Wadsworth was a helper. She believed love could heal anything and that her love could heal Sepple. "She was very committed to Jesus Christ, hope, love," says Jamie, the young missionary who called police to Sepple's house. "That's what Ashley wanted in her life."

A few days before Wadsworth was killed, she snuck out while Sepple wasn't home and met Jamie and another friend in Melbourne Park, about a 10-minute walk away. It was a quiet early afternoon. They sat at a picnic table, pausing their conversation to pet a dog being walked by the only people who passed by. Jamie sensed something was wrong, and picked a scripture, 2 Nephi 31:20, to read with her: "Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men."

For seven years, Wadsworth looked at Sepple's face intently, through computer screens and smartphones, at the airport when they finally met, every day of their short cohabitation and in the last moments of her life. Under his right eye, for some of that time, was a tattoo: "hope" in cursive writing—the holy premise she clung to, staring back at her, as though a sign that perfect brightness would come.

AFTER THE SENTENCING, the Wadsworths went to the rowhouse where their daughter had lived with Sepple. They looked in the windows. They laid bouquets on the ground, near where she had been carried to the lawn the day she died. They planted a garden at the site, leaving vibrant bursts to bloom against abominable memories. As soon as Gendron returned to Vernon, she went to Wadsworth's grave with Hailey. They brought Hailey's young daughter along, who took her new double-decker bus toy and excitedly set it up for her aunt to see.

Hailey says her sister sends signs from heaven. Sometimes she looks in the mirror and sees her. Doors in the family's home seem to open and close on their own. Lights turn on and off by themselves. Family members keep finding white, fluffy feathers around their property. Birds visit, and dragonflies. Last August, Kowalchuk got married, and Hailey stood in for her sister as a bridesmaid. As the sun set, a butterfly landed on the flowers. Unquestionably, Hailey says, it was Ashley. "I believe she's there," says Hailey. "And after this life we get forever with her." ■

Habitat

THE COUNTRY'S MOST CREATIVE LIVING SPACES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RENAUD LAFRENIÈRE**

RETRO FEVER

The ’70s are back in this Quebec couple’s unique vintage home

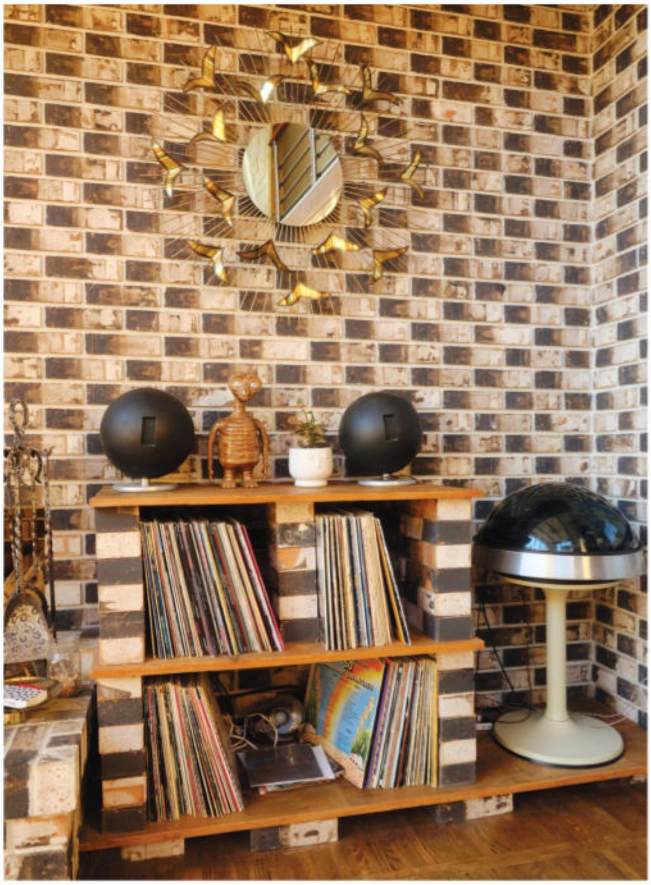
By Isabel B. Slone

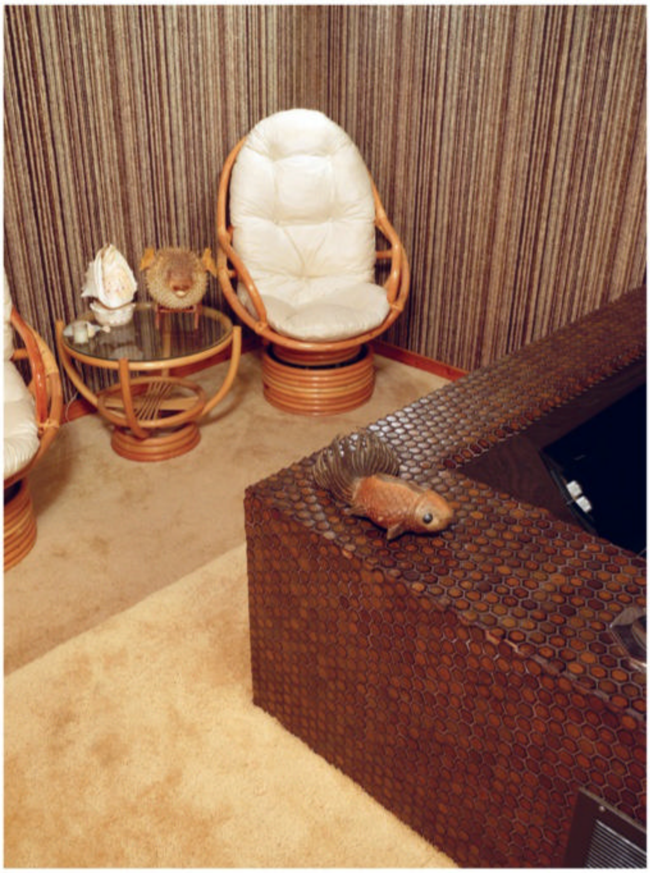
IN 2019, MARTIN DUMAS, a graphic designer, and his partner, Maude Beaupré, a TV producer, were feeling cramped. They had been renting a three-bedroom place in Montreal’s Little Burgundy neighbourhood for the past 12 years, paying $865 a month. After their daughter, Simone, was born in 2012, the couple realized they needed more space. They started imagining a move—preferably to a more pastoral setting.

Dumas and Beaupré hoped to find a rambling old house in the countryside filled with vintage character, as opposed to a cookie-cutter new build in a suburb. That September, Dumas sketched a crude illustration of an A-frame with a squat addition on a pink Post-It note. He joked to Beaupré that he had just drawn the house of his dreams. A day later, their realtor sent over a listing for a small home with a stucco exterior that bore a strange resemblance to his illustration. “My boyfriend doesn’t believe in the idea that the universe sent it to us, but we were in shock,” says Beaupré.

She runs an interior decor Instagram account, @stalker.fever, where she collects images of quirky homes she finds in real estate listings. The house, with its retro brown-and-orange colour scheme, fit right in. It was further from Montreal than they’d have liked—an hour’s drive away in rural Rawdon township—but the couple agreed to see the place nonetheless. As soon as they toured it, they were sold. Built in 1968, their home looks like

GOOD VIBES ONLY Beaupré and Dumas brought their vintage furniture collection when they moved in, though some pieces, like the orange-and-chrome couch, were left over from previous owners





GET YOUR GROOVE ON Each room has a funky design feature, whether it's the main bedroom's mirrored ceiling or a Jacuzzi surrounded by carpeted floor

KEEP ON TRUCKIN' Living in a home from the '70s can be expensive to maintain, but this couple want to preserve their vintage build for as long as possible

a tiny bungalow from the outside and a 1970s fever dream on the inside. The decor worked well with the mid-century aesthetic Dumas and Beaupré had already cultivated in their Montreal apartment. They moved in most of their old furniture, keeping a few choice pieces from the previous owners, like the orange couch with chrome detailing in the living room. "It feels great to be in this groovy yet soothing space, surrounded by trees and tranquility," Beaupré says.

The main bathroom has an avocado-green toilet, bathtub and sink. The abundant wood detailing in the kitchen adds warmth—especially when the day approaches sunset and the light floods in. The expansive split-level living room has cathedral ceilings, a black fireplace and floor-to-ceiling windows that frame a panoramic view of the backyard.

There are practical things to consider when it comes to modern life in a vintage build. Dumas, who is six-foot-one, often hits his head on the alcove above the stove in the kitchen. The house is also less energy efficient than newer places, so the monthly hydro bills are high. If something breaks, service workers are usually hesitant about doing repairs out of concern they will damage the house. "One of my worst fears is that something will happen to the plumbing and I'll have to rip up one of the bathrooms," Beaupré says. "I keep thinking, *Just hold on for one more year!*"

The couple also initially thought that some of the retro touches were a little *too* '70s. The kitchen's decor, for example, included bright orange tiling, wooden walls, a built-in Jenn-Air grill and a supposedly soundproof padded ceiling that, according to Beaupré, resembles "cooked spaghetti." But over time, the couple realized how well these features fit in with their place's overall aesthetic, and they decided to run with them. The home's unique design has even become an object of fascination for others. After Beaupré joined a location-scouting group on Facebook, the home was chosen to appear in several Québécois artists' music videos and a fashion campaign for the glasses brand BonLook.

"There's something very sexy about this home," says Beaupré. To wit: the primary bedroom has a mirrored ceiling. The real crown jewel, however, is the Jacuzzi room, furnished with a built-in sauna, beige carpeting and textured walls. Whenever guests visit, Beaupré always tells them to bring a bathing suit. One day, she also hopes to invite over one of the original owners to swap stories about what these walls witnessed back in the copacetic '70s. "It's pretty rare that you see vintage houses for sale that are in pristine condition," Beaupré says. "I like to imagine the parties that were thrown here." ■

BURGER BARON
MUSHROOM BURGERS
DONAIRS
MILKSHAKES
TEXAS CHICKEN
When better BURGERS are made
makes
DRIVE THRU
BURGER BARON

FAST-FOOD ROYALTY Omar Mouallem, pictured above, was next in line to inherit his parents' Burger Baron restaurant

THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF CANADA'S WEIRDEST FAST-FOOD FRANCHISE

How a failed McDonald's knock-off became a fast-food success for generations of Lebanese-Canadian immigrants in Alberta

By Omar Mouallem

IF YOU DIDN'T GROW UP in Alberta, you've probably never heard of Burger Baron. It's a fast-food chain in only the loosest terms, with a menu that varies wildly from location to location. The branding? There is none in the traditional corporate sense, except for the words "Burger Baron" in each restaurant's name. Some franchisees have pluralized it (Burger Barons), others eponymized it (Kelly's Burger Baron) and others embellished it (Burger Baron Pizza & Steak).

There have been nearly as many logos as locations—some, but not all, are reinterpretations of the original logo, a colourful little knight with crusader crosses on his shield. The menus, meanwhile, can run practically as long as a Chinese restaurant's. Some of the Barons have actually sold Chinese food, or Greek, or Italian, or Indigenous-inspired bannock burgers. The only guarantees are two burger recipes: the flagship Baron and the mushroom burger, their presence assured thanks to their cultish popularity with Albertans. The mushroom burger—a curiously soupy sandwich that looks and tastes like Campbell's cream of mushroom—is especially beloved.

There's one other guarantee: almost every single franchisee hails from a Lebanese family like mine. I was made a baronet as an infant, when my parents, Ahmed and Tamam Mouallem, moved from Slave Lake, Alberta, to the even smaller town of High Prairie, four hours northwest of Edmonton, to open their franchise. They were shrewd Lebanese who had left their country, once the Middle East's capital of commerce, before it was destabilized by ethnic cleansing and sectarian violence. My dad's uncle, living in Slave Lake, sponsored his arrival in Canada in 1971, when Lebanon was teetering on the edge of civil war. By the time my dad returned home to find a bride in his hometown near the Syrian border, "Beirut" had already become synonymous with urban ruin.

As immigrants, they were following a proud tradition of Lebanese immigration to Alberta. Their predecessors—Lebanese peddlers, homesteaders, fur traders—had erected some of Canada's first minarets and laid the groundwork for folks like us. And my parents, in turn, put a lot of work into leveraging and protecting that legacy, taking the model minority trope straight to heart. They wanted their Burger Baron to be that restaurant-for-all-occasions that anchors every small town. And they wanted the townfolk to know that even these brownfolk would sponsor the local hockey team and sign their boys up to play—and replace their son's name on his jersey with the name of their business. At 12 years old, I was a skating billboard, with "Burger Baron" emblazoned in lieu of my name on my extra-large yet too-tight jersey, for all of the five minutes I got on ice per game.

When my dad and I travelled from town to town for hockey games, he insisted we stop in at his counterparts' businesses to meet franchise owners and reminisce/bitch about the homeland. It struck me as strange that all the Burger Baron owners were Lebs like us. Weirder still were the infinite incarnations of the chain. But despite its crapshoot reputation, my folks were tremendously proud of building a landmark in a community without many.

As I got older, I had mixed feelings about the restaurant, which seemed more like a prison at times. My relationship with it became even more complicated after I convinced my parents to pull me out of hockey—a request that backfired, because I was suddenly expected to put extra time into the family business. I worked in the drive-thru and dish pit alongside my older brother, Ali, who was being groomed more rigorously for succession on the grills. It calmed me to know that in Arab culture, the eldest son was the de facto steward of the family legacy. It was never in question who would inherit the throne; at most I'd been tapped as an understudy, in case tragedy should befall the future emir.

I had more cosmopolitan ambitions. I wanted to be a filmmaker, which my parents lightly indulged by sending me to summer film camp in Red Deer and letting me work a cushy job at the local video store. While Ali was expected to show up every day after school, and on most weekends, I was only called into

WHEN BETTER BURGERS ARE MADE
BURGER BARON MAKES THEM
Best MUSHROOM BURGERS in Town
WELCOME to the Burger Baron
DRIVE IN & RESTAURANT "we do care for you"
OPEN
DRIVE THRU OPEN

BEHIND THE BURGER BARON Jack McDonnell (above), an American businessman, started the little-known chain in 1957. After bankruptcy devastated his company, franchise owners were left to fend for themselves. Burger Baron has since gained a cult following, attracting visitors and internet fans for its off-kilter kitsch.

Mouallem by Aaron Pedersen; restaurant photographs courtesy of Amber Bracken/Back Road Productions

the restaurant when they were slammed. Once my brother could competently close the cash registers at night, my parents and I all sighed with relief. I started planning my escape, able finally to pursue my passions in peace.

In 2003, I moved from rural Alberta to downtown Vancouver to study film and writing, and later made my way back to my home province, to make a living at it in Edmonton. It was there that I began noticing people's faces lighting up when they learned my family was part of a provincial institution. I was surprised to find a cult following for Burger Baron in the form of tattoos, a scene in the raucous comedy *Fubar 2* and even a parody Twitter account: @Burger_Baron, known for trolling corporate fast-food chains. While the competition spent millions mastering reproduction, Burger Baron was the anti-chain, and people loved it. I was newly proud of being a baronet—not royalty, but evidence of the good life my parents had built for Ali and me.

I started investigating the chain's origins 10 years ago as a magazine reporter, hoping to find the founder and thank him for what he'd given us. To my shock, he was not Lebanese. He was an American entrepreneur who'd moved his family to Calgary in 1957, with a plan to found the McDonald's of the north. His name? McDonnell, Jack. But McDonnell moved too aggressively on his expansion plans, and his company quickly burned up its forward momentum, leaving behind a trail of franchise owners orphaned by a bankrupted company. As far as anyone knows, the company's intellectual property, like the name and logo, was never purchased by creditors or passed down to the next of kin. According to his son Terry McDonnell, Jack, who died in 1983, gave them all the recipes and wished them good luck.

The Burger Barons started to vanish quickly. By the mid-'60s, only a handful remained, each independently owned and operated—sometimes even posted for sale in the classifieds. And who would ever want to buy a decentralized fast-food chain, with all the headaches of maintaining a brand and no corporate upside? The answer is Riad Kemaldean, a.k.a. "Uncle Rudy," a.k.a. "the Godfather." An astute businessman with a penchant for suits and cigars, Kemaldean bought his first Baron in Edmonton, in 1965. Its success helped him sponsor friends and relatives from back home; he set them up to manage new locations, which in turn became training grounds for his proteges' own friends and relatives. The Burger Baron's second wave spread through chain immigration, accelerating during Lebanon's civil war from 1975 to 1990, and it continues at a slower pace today. My dad apprenticed with his uncle, who bought one of the original Burger Barons from another Lebanese man, who had apprenticed with Rudy in the '70s. Without royalties or start-up fees, the trade secrets proliferated through handshakes and favours, holding fast through every dining trend of the past five decades.

By the time I'd pieced together the puzzle, I'd grown fonder of Burger Baron and my family's role in it. Like many second-generation kids, I struggled to see myself in Canadian culture, but being a baronet makes me feel like I'm part of the fabric of Alberta—and, in a strange way, like I'm connected to the homeland.

It struck me as strange that all the Burger Baron owners were Lebs like us

LEAVING THEIR MARK The Mouallems wanted their restaurant to be a well-loved hub in their small Alberta town

Photograph courtesy of Omar Mouallem

IN 2021, I BEGAN WORK on a documentary film: *The Lebanese Burger Mafia*. By the time I returned to High Prairie to film it, Ali had been running our parents' Burger Baron for over a decade, doing things more or less the way our dad did—right down to sponsoring his son's hockey team. Only he'd been doing it under a new, jazzier name: "The Boondocks Grill." Another Burger Baron gone.

At the chain's peak in the early '90s, there were more than 50 independent locations, about twice as many as there are today. Burger Baron's heyday is over, as owners struggle to compete amid the rise of big-box restaurants and foodie culture. The biggest challenge has been the next-of-kin, second-generation Lebanese-Canadians like me who've become white-collar workers not in spite of Burger Baron's success, but because of it.

Many of those who have remained in the business, like my brother, are eager to distance themselves from its outmoded reputation. I was quick to tease Ali for betraying our family legacy—renaming the place, renovating it to look more like a steakhouse, adding upmarket bison burgers and, interestingly, my mom's fattoush salad recipe. But my real motivation was to find out whether he felt like his succession was a choice. Did my freedoms as the baby of the family make him resent his inheritance?

"A little bit," he admitted. "I didn't understand why you had these options. But with me, I was already groomed for it." But Ali said those feelings were never stronger than the pride and satisfaction that came from running a small-town diner very well. "I've been able to provide for the family in a community that I love, that I grew up in. It's what I know. I guess it's what I love." ■

Omar Mouallem is the director of The Lebanese Burger Mafia, *playing in Edmonton's Fort Edmonton Park on July 15.*

A SPECIAL INTEREST SECTION BY MEDIAPLANET

Employee Wellness & Total Rewards

JUNE 20-21
6TH ANNUAL EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE SUMMIT 2023
Advance your EX program to attract and retain top talent, drive organizational performance and improve company culture. Learn more at **employeeexperiencesummit.ca**.

MANULIFE TRANSFORMING EMPLOYEE HEALTH for Canadians and our workplaces.
Learn more on page 2 & 3.

SEPT. 26-28
WELLBEING AT WORK CANADIAN SUMMIT IN TORONTO & CALGARY
Early-bird discounts available now at **wellbeingatwork.world**.

Are Your Employees Flourishing at Work? Here's How to Help

When employees are supported and empowered in the workplace, they're much more likely to flourish — both at work and outside it.

Alison Grenier

Great Place to Work, the world leader in workplace assessment, recently partnered with Johns Hopkins University to conduct a large study of 14,000 people in 37 countries on workplace well-being.

Key findings from the research include:

- Employee well-being is a key predictor of employee retention and referrals. Those who experience high levels of well-being in the workplace are three times more likely to stay and three times more likely to recommend their employer to others.
- Employee well-being is complex and made up of five factors: mental/emotional support, personal support, purpose, financial health, and meaningful connections. When people have a consistently positive experience across these five factors, they can flourish inside and outside of work.

"It's widely accepted that our biological health can be influenced by psychological and social factors and vice versa," says Alison Grenier, Head of Culture and Research at Great Place to Work Canada. "Your job has the potential to have a profound positive or negative impact on your health, so choosing a job can be one of the most important health decisions you'll make in your life."

Helping employees to flourish

At the intersection of healthy people and healthy organizations, we see people flourishing at work. Our research shows only about one out of six people in average workplaces are flourishing at work, compared to four out of six people at high-trust workplaces. Why? Most employees experience significant gaps in purpose and connections, so when they ask themselves, "Why do I work here?" and can't come up with a good answer or don't feel connected to their employer, there's a high risk they'll walk out the door.

So how do you create an environment where your employees can flourish? Sure, office gyms and meditation breaks are nice, but as we've seen, employee well-being is much more complex than this. Employers should instead focus on leading by example, empowering employees to shape their contribution, listening to employees, and tailoring strategies to support them. 🟩

Alison Grenier
Head of Culture and Research, Great Place to Work Canada

Learn more at **greatplacetowork.ca**.

This article was **sponsored by Great Place To Work Canada.**

Publisher: **Evan Sebesta** Business Development Manager: **Chelsea Siemon** Content Strategist: **Nicole Kansakar** Country Manager: **Nina Theodorlis** Production Lead: **Michael Taylor** Creative Lead: **Kylie Armishaw** Digital Media Coordinator: **Kristen Neals** Web Editor: **Christina Morgan** Digital Traffic Strategist: **Karm Rathod** All images are from Getty Images unless otherwise credited. This section was created by Mediaplanet and did not involve Maclean's Magazine or its editorial departments. Send all inquiries to **ca.editorial@mediaplanet.com**.

How Manulife Is Transforming Employee Health through Proactive Care

Manulife is helping Canadian workers to navigate an often complex and increasingly stretched health care system using a preventative health approach.

Tania Amardeil

Manulife Group Benefits isn’t just about paying claims anymore.

As an industry leader with approximately five million Canadians covered by its group benefits plans, Manulife is evolving from a traditional claims payer to a health partner focused on employee health outcomes and advancing digital health technology. Today, Manulife is helping to lead the future of employee and organizational health by providing Canadians with innovative health solutions that go beyond traditional insurance coverage.

Delivering the future of employee health care

Working Canadians face a myriad of health issues that affect their ability to perform their jobs effectively, resulting in absenteeism, lost productivity, and increased health care costs.

“Our data demonstrates that on average, about 48 days are lost per employee each year due to health-related absenteeism or presenteeism,” says Ashesh Desai, Head of Group Benefits at Manulife Canada. “Our data also shows that 40 per cent of people aren’t doing the recommended amount of physical activity and that 46 per cent are experiencing at least one work-related mental health risk factor. Just paying claims isn’t going to help these issues.”

The team at Manulife decided to take a more proactive approach to supporting Canadians on their health care journeys.

> We’re focused on prevention, timely intervention, and supported recovery by helping offer the right care, at the right time, in the right place.

Creating a culture of health and wellness

One of the ways Manulife is achieving this goal is by focusing on helping Canadians manage personal health issues and navigate Canada's complex, often-disjointed health care system with a focus on prevention.

“We’re in a very unique position,” says Desai. “We receive and process a lot of claims for people, so we have an opportunity to connect with them every time a claim is processed to understand the impact of that claim. As a result of what we’ve learned, we’re building an innovative and proactive care model. We’re focused on prevention, timely intervention, and supported recovery by helping offer the right care, at the right time, in the right place.”

Manulife’s innovative new care model integrates all its offerings, from wellness and disability programs to pharmacy, dental, and beyond — bringing it all together into one place that’s accessible and personalized.

The benefits of a personalized approach

From personalized medicine programs to accessible resources to prompt guidance based on individuals’ health data trends, Manulife’s preventative approach is all about promoting healthy lifestyles, providing access to information and support, and addressing health concerns early, to help reduce the likelihood of more severe health issues down the road. Going far beyond traditional benefits, the proactive care model aims to create a culture of health and wellness that supports employees at every stage of their health journey — including prevention, intervention, and recovery.

The approach also focuses heavily on accessibility. “We know that most working Canadians want their employers to make it easier for them to digitally access their health care benefits all in one spot,” says Desai. “No one wants to go to multiple spots to access their claims, how much coverage they have left, and so on. We’re very focused on making lives better and making decisions easier, and we’re very focused on enhancing our digital capabilities.” ■

Ashesh Desai
Head of Group Benefits, Manulife Canada

Health Trends Employers Need To Watch

Manulife curated this infographic in collaboration with Cleveland Clinic Canada. Understanding health trends and the needs of your team, allows you to invest wisely in your benefits and invest in the health and well-being of your employees as well as curb absenteeism and improve productivity.

The health of your employees should be your top issue of business. Use these trends to start a conversation at your next leadership meeting.

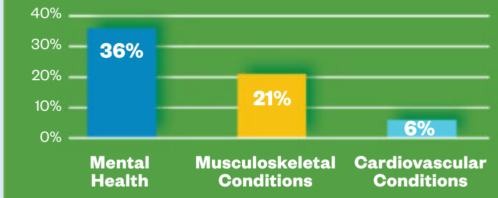
Cleveland Clinic
Canada

There are key groups of conditions driving benefits use and disability claims:

Canadian workers are using their benefits plans to get help with **mental health, musculoskeletal, and cardiovascular system conditions** more than any other chronic conditions.

(Manulife data: 2022)

Canadian workers on
long-term disability



By long-term disability claims of Canadian workers (primary diagnosis)

Employers can influence employee health, including mental health:

46% of employees have a work-related mental health risk factor including work and life responsibilities feeling out of balance, and/or lack of involvement and influence in how work is completed.

Manulife Wellness Report, 2022

A significant number of employees have difficulty accessing primary care, which can delay timely diagnosis, treatment, or follow-up for acute and chronic conditions:

Nearly **1 in 5** Canadian employees can't find a family doctor.

Health Care and Public Opinion, CLHIA, 2023

Less than half or 43% of adult Canadians can get a timely appointment with a family doctor.

Health Care and Public Opinion, CLHIA, 2023

Employees want to work with companies that offer innovative benefits.

70% say virtual care would help them be proactive with their health and mental health, as well as their family's health.

Dialogue/Environics, 2021

82% of Canadian workers think employers should provide **virtual care services** for their employees.

Dialogue/Environics, 2021

Want to learn more about what the future of employee health care means for your business or organization? Contact your advisor or Manulife representative or visit **manulife.ca/employeehealth** to learn more.

This article was **sponsored by Manulife**.

Manulife

Employment Service Provider: WASO Inc (Work and Social Opportunities Inc, waso.ca)
Employer: Computers for Schools. Technical Director, James Wilson
Jobseeker/Mentee: Logan

Beyond Buzzwords: Diversity and Inclusion Are Key to Economic Success

Inclusive workplaces benefit everyone socially, culturally, and economically.

Katherine Cappellacci

In 2017, the Canada Survey on Disability found that 6.2 million Canadians ages 15 and older had a disability, with 20 per cent being working age , from 25 to 64.[1] This staggering statistic illustrates what many industry professionals are echoing — that there's a huge, untapped workforce right in our own backyard.

That's why the Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE) has been working to increase the inclusion of people experiencing disabilities in the labour force. CASE and it's network of local employment service providers work with employers, community allies and other stakeholders, offering them necessary resources and support.

CASE wants businesses to know that there are countless benefits to inclusive hiring. "A diverse group of people brings broader-ranging skills to the workplace, fostering creativity and innovation in ways that homogenous teams don't," explains Joanna Goode, Executive Director of CASE.

Countless advantages

A diverse team is better at problem-solving and strategic thinking, leading to higher performance levels, a more positive work environment, and lower employee turnover. Plus, being exposed to differing perspectives helps everyone expand their world view, resulting in greater social inclusiveness, acceptance, and understanding.

> “
> A diverse group of people brings broader-ranging skills to the workplace, fostering creativity and innovation in ways that homogenous teams don't.

Moreover, people who experience disability are Canada's hidden workforce. "But they've been told there was no room for them before," says Deborah Hotchkiss, Partners in Employment Executive Director. "They're the solution to labour force shortages, especially to keep productivity going in rural areas."

CASE is here to assist employers in attracting and retaining people experiencing disability. "We offer free resources, and links to services available in your community says Goode. “Supported Employment Service Providers across the country help businesses make all stages of their recruitment and retention processes accessible to people with disabilities.”

It goes beyond having proper policies and infrastructure — there also needs be a shift in thinking and organizational culture that transfers into every aspect of work life and communication.

Multi-level development

Accessibility must be taken into consideration every step of the way, starting with ensuring that the application process is itself accessible. “Build awareness about people with disabilities in your workplace and make accessibility a priority, not an afterthought,” says Michelle Buckland, Founder of EMBRACE 2 Learn Inc., an Accessibility Advisor, and a Learning and Development Consultant, and Speaker. Buckland, who experienced disability challenges herself, encourages companies to include people with disabilities in their conversations around increasing inclusiveness and creating policies.

In Canada, about 3 in 500 women executives and 4 in 500 male executives experience disability.[2] Most companies have employees who experience a variety of disabilities, whether they’re episodic, invisible, or visible.

These businesses have developed supportive workplace cultures where everyone is encouraged to bring their whole, best selves to work. “They’ve reduced barriers in the hiring process and reevaluated company structures,” says Goode. “Employers are inclusive, use respectful, person-centered language, and are specific about accessibility options. And they thrive as a result.”

> “
> **Interestingly, when workplaces shift toward accessibility for people who experience disability, they also make it a better place to work for everyone.**

Leading by example

Companies that prioritize inclusion are paving the way — they’re demonstrating that everybody benefits when accessibility is prioritized. Highlighting each person’s unique talents and abilities, they know that successful work teams are made up of people who complement each other’s skills.

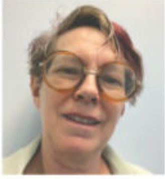
In fact, employers who already have these best practices in place tend to improve capacity, staff retention and overall happiness. “Work environments that encourage accessibility, physical and mental wellness are proven to have reduced sick days and increased productivity,” says Goode. “Interestingly, when workplaces shift toward accessibility for people who experience disability, they also make it a better place to work for everyone.”

As the COVID-19 pandemic made evident, companies can be flexible and accommodating when they choose to be. “There’s a fear of hiring people who experience disabilities because historically, there’s been an emphasis on what they can’t do instead of what they can,” Hotchkiss says. “They’re an underrepresented labour pool with wide-ranging skill sets.”

For businesses that understand the value and importance of inclusivity but are unsure of how to start shifting toward it, CASE and local employment providers have free, easily accessible resources and training opportunities. ■

Joanna Goode
Executive Director,
CASE

Michelle Buckland
Founder,
EMBRACE 2 Learn Inc.



Deborah Hotchkiss
Executive Director,
Partners in
Employment

EXIT
Mr. Pretzels

Employment Service Provider: Calgary Alternative Employment Services, AB
calgary-employment.ca
Employer: Mr. Pretzels, South Centre Mall, Calgary
Store Manager: Lori Zohar
Jobseeker/Mentee: Adam

To learn more about how to hire for a diverse workforce, visit **supportedemployment.ca**.

This article was **sponsored by the Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE)**.

SOURCES

1.Beall, Avery. “This Infographic Provides an Overview of Accessibility in Canada. The Infographic Includes Persons with and without Disabilities.” Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, December 2, 2022. April 29, 2023. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2022062-eng.htm.

2.Munyeshuli, Alvin, and Léa-Maude Longpré-Verret. “This Infographic Provides an Overview on the Type of Enterprise in Which Executives with Disability Are More Likely to Work and Some of Their Personal Characteristic. Specifically, the Share of Executives with Disabilities by Gender Is Shown, Followed by the Shares of Executives with Disabilities by Industry and Type of Enterprise. Some Personal Information on the Age, Type of Disability and the Number of Disability Is Also Included.” Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, April 4, 2023. April 28, 2023. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2023019-eng.htm.

Investing in a Healthy Workforce Will Lead to a Successful Business

Invest in employee well-being, create a purpose-driven workplace, prioritize mental health, and thrive in the future of work.

Chris Cummings

We have had a myriad of challenges across the globe, including some difficult economic conditions in Canada during recent months. This, along with record burnout figures, the great reset, and a purpose-seeking employee market has given leaders some significant headaches during the first part of 2023. However, looking back at previous slowdowns, it took bravery to make bold decisions and history shows it works — so that is my rallying call to today's leaders in Canada.

Organizations are nothing without their people — that's a fact. How many times do you see on company websites saying that their people are their most important asset? Well, let's test that theory!

Wellbeing at Work holds the key to many of these challenges and that is what workers of all ages are looking for and expect now — a personalised approach to wellbeing that delivers for all; a purpose driven organization with authentic and empathetic leadership that provides human connection in an inclusive environment.

> Wellbeing at Work holds the key to many of these challenges and that is what workers of all ages are looking for and expect now — a personalised approach to wellbeing that delivers for all.

Legislation is coming too. Governments across the world have wellbeing in the workplace top of the agenda with the NSW Government in Australia implementing legal requirements to employers to create mentally healthy workplaces, the Dutch Government exploring the right to remote work into law, and debates in the UK's parliament have re-surfaced recently with elected officials discussing a new law requiring businesses to offer mental health first aid training.

So, I challenge you as organizations to look beyond the short term and go into the future of work with gusto. Don't just talk about how important your people are on your website, invest properly in the wellbeing of your colleagues, reap the significant rewards, and build a healthy culture that delivers on all levels. ■

Chris Cummings
CEO,
Wellbeing at Work

ℹ Early-bird discounts available now at **wellbeingatwork.world**.

Failure Isn't Fatal: A First-Hand Employee Wellness Journey and Call To Action for Leaders

Businesses must embrace authenticity and transparency, supporting mental health and flexible work.

Kayla Isabelle, CEO, Startup Canada

Businesses too often uphold a public-facing employer identity rooted in innate perfection and faultless leadership. While it's often necessary for organizations to safeguard their public perceptions when faced with adversity, a complete, conscious absence of authenticity can do more harm than we may imagine.

> As a national convenor of small businesses, Startup Canada knows that entrepreneurship can be a hard, lonely journey.

As a national convenor of small businesses, Startup Canada knows that entrepreneurship can be a hard, lonely journey. But it could be slightly easier if we all acknowledged this reality, embraced transparency, and showed up for our community with a spirit of collaboration and mutual understanding.

My first month at the helm was in March of 2020 - the onset of the pandemic and the greatest economic crisis in recent history to confront Canadian founders. Amidst a crash course in crisis management, I was completely overwhelmed balancing internal and external demands. Serving this community in need of urgent support was incredibly fulfilling, but this new reality simultaneously elevated pressure on our team.

Recognizing that flexibility and people-first leadership were non-negotiable, we immediately implemented permanent remote work protocols, paid mental health days, half day Fridays, and a monthly wellness initiative. In addition focus was placed on transforming institutional culture via consistent check-ins, collaborative decision making, and relentlessly fostering psychological safety.

Marked by both mountains of success and valleys of failure, this has been a beautiful journey of self discovery and collective lessons learned. Leading during change is an exercise with differing nuances, contexts, and ideal solutions. However, a few learnings are likely universal for fellow leaders:

1. You can do anything, but not everything.
2. What got you here might not get you there.
3. Don't light yourself on fire to keep others warm.

Failure is inevitable, but if those in the business community can show up authentically, we can all help in reducing the stigma and isolation that often accompanies it. ■

Kayla Isabelle
CEO,
Startup Canada

ℹ To learn more about Startup Canada and to connect with the team visit **startupcan.ca**.

New App Helps People With Intellectual Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder Succeed In The Workplace

The Routine Factory app provides structure and predictability to people with intellectual disabilities by offering an easier way to track job tasks.

Anne Papmehl

For individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder, participating in the workforce is a key to self-worth and independence. For employers, it's good for business.

"It's been shown that when employers hire diversely, they attract more customers who want to support inclusive businesses," says Aron Jenkins, Building Blocks Coordinator at the Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE), a national association for the supported employment sector. "It also boosts employee retention because these individuals tend to not change jobs as often, so it's a great opportunity for businesses to tap into a group of individuals who really want to be working."

Enhancing accountability and learning

CASE recently partnered with Inclusion Winnipeg — an organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities — to find ways to make it easier for these individuals to complete their workplace tasks. They settled on an app called Routine Factory. The app works by prompting the user for their current task, letting them check it off when done, and then prompting them for the next step, thereby keeping them constantly moving and on time.

By breaking complex tasks down to step-by-step visual instructions, the Routine Factory app provides structure and predictability, which is important to these clients. "Many struggle with anxiety about next steps in their assigned tasks, so this helps with prompts and they can recheck tasks without going to a manager," says Jenkins.

Among the app's users across Canada is an employee at IKEA, who recently used it on her own to successfully apply for college admission, as well as a group of employees at Something Beautiful Café and Gift Shop in Stonewall, Man. ■

Learn more about Routine Factory or Inclusion Winnipeg by visiting **subscribepage.io/remote-job-coach**.

This article was **sponsored by Inclusion Winnipeg**.

Discover tools and resources to help you create a **disability inclusive workplace**

- Contact a local Supported Employment Service Provider through our service provider registry.
- Refer to the HR Inclusive Policy Toolkit.
- Learn through free, 40-minute online employer training.
- Explore 400+ resources on the Supported Employment Resource Hub.
- Sign up for CASE's employer e-newsletter for resources to help you create inclusive workplaces.

www.supportedemployment.ca

case **Canadian Association for Supported Employment**

HOMEWARD BOUND

After tragedy struck, photojournalist Darren Calabrese documented his return to the East Coast in a new book

By Caitlin Walsh Miller

EVER SINCE DARREN CALABRESE WAS A CHILD, his mother told him that one day he'd have to leave Douglas Harbour, the New Brunswick farming hamlet he was born in, and search for success elsewhere. She knew the area's opportunities were limited—both for his future career and for other life experiences. She was right. He went to Halifax for university, where he met his future wife, Tammy, also from the Maritimes. Eventually the couple settled in Toronto, where Calabrese developed a career as a documentarian and photojournalist, and Tammy as a nurse. For 11 years, Calabrese freelanced for publications including the *Globe and Mail, Monocle* and CNN, travelling to places like Tanzania and Japan on assignment.

◀ “Nunatsiavut, the Inuit territory that stretches along the coast of northern Labrador, has an annual polar bear hunt. It’s tradition. It’s how they’ve lived for thousands of years. From a practical standpoint, it’s also meat, which gets divvied up to community freezers all along the coast. After the group got this bear, there was such a buzz: excitement, pride, gratitude. When the snowmobiles brought the bear back to town, it was like a funeral procession—there was a total understanding that this animal gave itself up for them.”

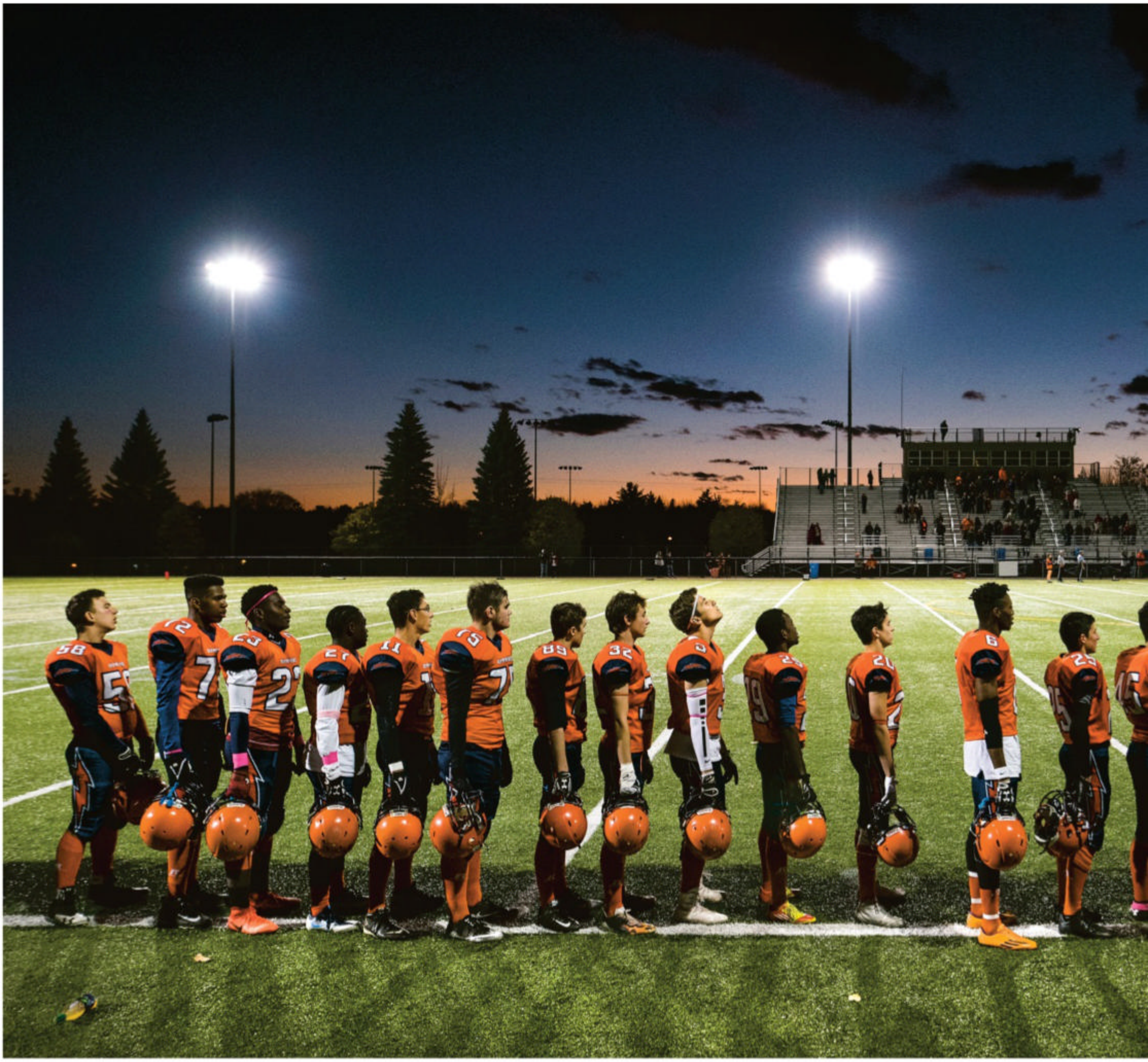
Photographer Darren Calabrese grew up in a New Brunswick farming village

Then in June of 2014, he received terrible news. His mother had died in a freak accident: an oak tree branch snapped and fell on her while she was enjoying a glass of wine on the family property. By midnight, Calabrese was back home. He eventually realized he’d have to stay to help his father, who was suffering from symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder after the accident. Calabrese and Tammy had always talked about moving back, and by the end of 2015, they’d made the move permanent. Settling in Halifax, he and his family made regular trips to the homestead in New Brunswick and soon welcomed their second daughter.

People talk about the fog of grief, but during that time, the familiarity of the East Coast came into sharper relief for Calabrese. He felt an intense connection to the land: his family has lived on those 400 acres since the 18th century, and now he could watch his daughters play on the same stretch of untouched waterfront he and his father and his grandmother did. “Photos of us all look exactly the same,” he says. “I don’t take that for granted—not for a second.”

By 2016, Calabrese was working on a book of essays and photos—pictures shot on assignment, personal images, old family snapshots. It was about his family and the region, and how he grapples with his place in both. Then, in September of 2020, his father died unexpectedly of a heart attack. Calabrese spent deer season rewriting the book, stripping away the padding he’d unconsciously put in to protect his father. “He’d be okay with everything in it, but I didn’t want to cause him any more pain,” says Calabrese. “He’d be thrilled that our family and our home are in a book. That there would be a lasting legacy.”

That book, out now, is called *Leaving Good Things Behind*, and the ideas of loss, tradition and, yes, legacy run through it like a river. Since moving to Nova Scotia, Calabrese has been documenting the relationships between East Coast communities and their landscapes, capturing polar bear hunts in northern Labrador and oyster farms in Cape Breton. “There is a tension,” he writes, “between the perseverance of tradition and the inevitability of change.” Here, Calabrese talks about a few images from his book that capture the ever-evolving relationship between the land in Atlantic Canada and the people who call it home. ■



1: "I photographed this image for a story about concussions in football and the safety of the game in New Brunswick. It's nice from an aesthetic point of view, with the team lined up for the national anthem and all the orange helmets and uniforms. But what makes this a picture to me is the kid in the centre looking up at the sky. He brings a quiet, mournful quality to the image. I don't know what was going on in his head. The team they were about to face was known for playing a particularly physical game, so maybe he just recognized what he was in for."

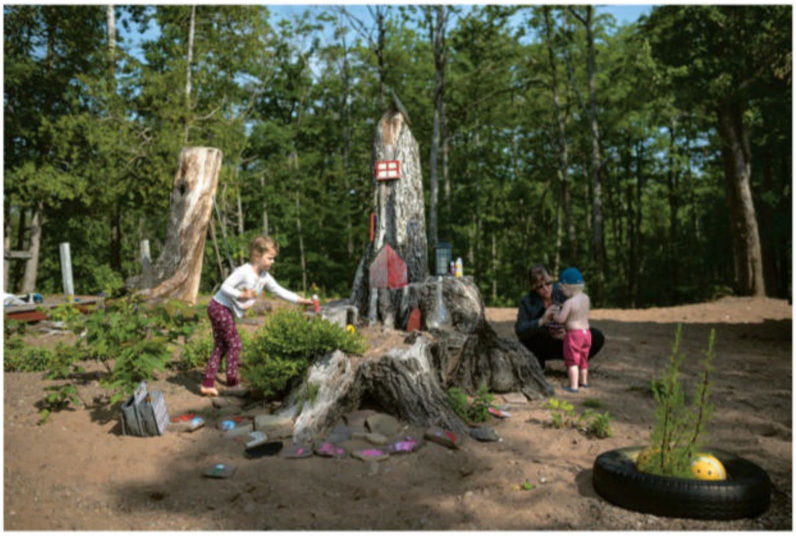
2: "Anyone who's grown up in rural Canada knows how important pageants are to the community. Generations of women—grandmothers, mothers, daughters—participate in them. This is the Oqnali'kiaq Princess Pageant in Eskasoni First Nation, a Mi'kmaq community on Cape Breton Island. The portrait of Alizabeth Jeddore opens the 'Island' chapter of the book. Here, she's seen taking a break from practising the 'Strong Woman Song,' which she performed in honour of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls."

3: "I've always been fascinated by mummering. It's a tradition that goes back centuries—you disguise yourself with whatever you have on hand, as Sarah Ferguson and her dog have done here, and visit your neighbours unannounced around Christmas. It's pure East Coast absurdity. There's no logical reason for traditions like this to exist, but they do. There's a perseverance to them, because they're meaningful to the communities that practise them. The best ones are special and unique. They don't have to be spectacular."

1

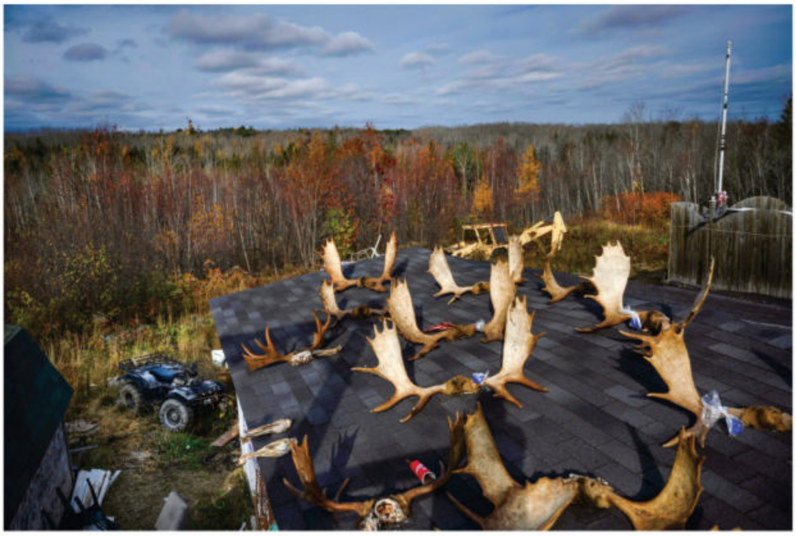
2

3

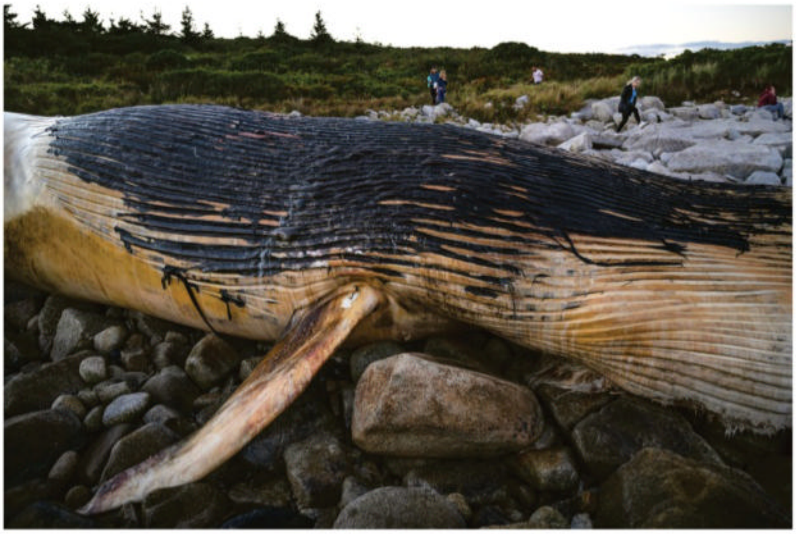


4

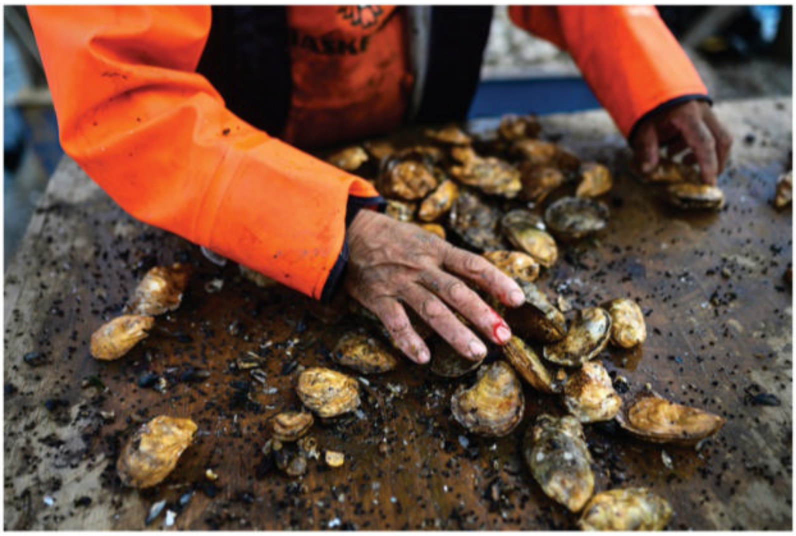
4: “This is the base of the tree that killed my mom. We cleared a lot of the surrounding trees immediately after the accident to be safe, but we kept the stump—it’s part of the landscape and our history, whether it’s there or not. So we decided to decorate it and give it a new context. My daughters, Harriet and June, painted rocks with my cousin Caryn. This is perseverance. This is what families do when you lose someone. You wear it, and you make it part of your life. You could try to avoid it, but in the end, it’s always there.”



5



6



7

5: "I didn't have the patience for hunting as a kid. Then, one day, I was on the 401 outside Toronto when I realized that if I could sit in traffic, I could sit in the woods. In 2015, six seasons in, I shot my first deer. My father and I brought it to Willie Mckellar's butcher shop in Minto, New Brunswick, which is a village near where I grew up. I didn't have my camera on me, but when I saw these moose antlers drying on a roof—an absolutely normal thing to see during moose and deer season in rural Canada—I raced home to get it. This day was the first time my dad and I were really loose and comfortable with each other at home. We were drinking beer and laughing, and things were great."

6: A blue whale washed up on a beach south of Halifax in 2021, and after much discussion, we took our daughters to pay our respects. It was beautiful—people were placing flowers on its tail. There was such reverence for this 30-metre-long whale. It's impossible to grasp the magnitude of its size until it's right in front of you. I wish I didn't see it this way, but there's a lot to be excavated from these emotional experiences. We talked about it with our kids the whole way home—why it died, what's going to happen next. And my eldest spent the next week reading about blue whales."

7: "Joe Googoo is a Cape Breton oyster agriculturalist from Waycobah First Nation with nearly five decades of experience. Since a deadly disease called MSX killed the Bras d'Or Lake oyster industry in 2002, he's been working with researchers to combine traditional knowledge and modern science to bring commercial oyster farming back to Cape Breton. He puts his literal blood and sweat into his harvest—that's how much it means to him."

Give the gift of insight

PLUS: HYDRO-QUÉBEC'S BILLION-DOLLAR POWER STRUGGLE / HOW COMPANIES SHOULD RESPOND TO POLITICAL EVENTS / WHAT'S DRIVING THE LABOUR SHORTAGE
CB
CANADIAN BUSINESS
"I was fighting for a seat at the table. Now I'm creating my own table." —VANESSA FORD, ENTERTAINMENT MOGUL
HOW I MADE IT
10 of this year's breakout entrepreneurs spill the secrets to their success

Subscribe today at canadianbusiness.com/subscribe

Find out more about membership at
canadianbusiness.com/corporate-memberships

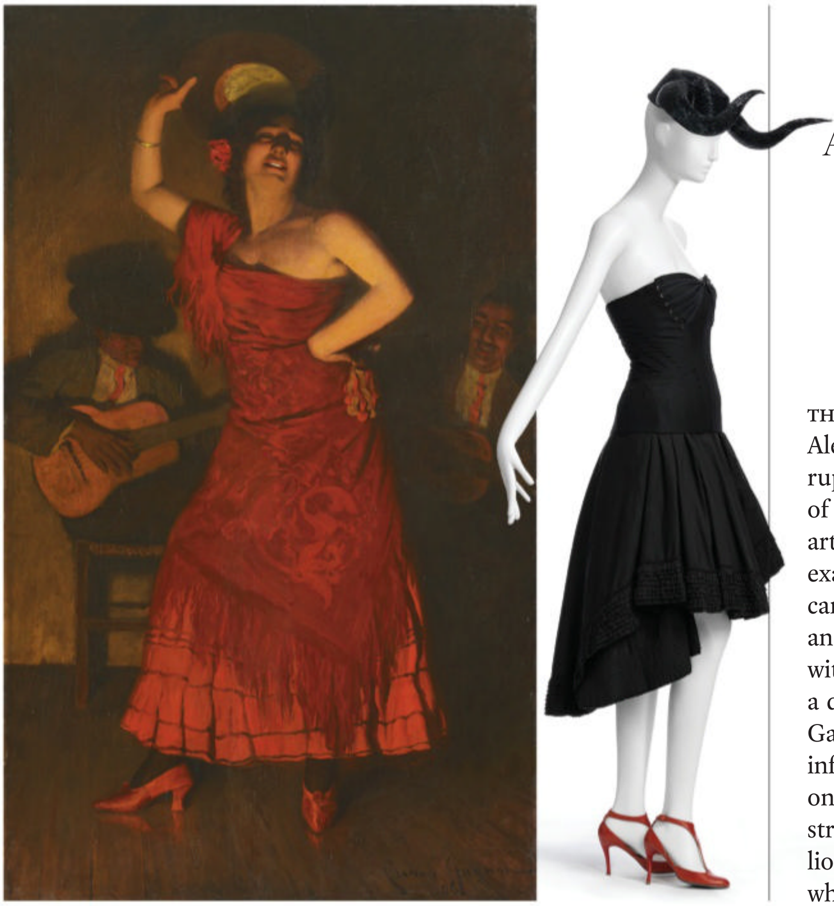
FILM

A PLASTIC-TASTIC SATIRE

BARBIE

July 21

THE MUCH-HYPED, HOT-PINK *Barbie* finally, finally, arrives smack dab in the middle of roller-blading and beach season. What could have been a silly kid's flick was transformed into a neon fever dream when subversive director Greta Gerwig signed on to write the top-secret screenplay, which has made the internet giddy with teasers for months. A slate of Canadian actors star alongside Margot Robbie as the male dolls, including a bleach-blond, uber-fit Ryan Gosling as boyfriend Ken; Simu Liu as, um, another Ken; and Michael Cera as the dorky (and discontinued) Allan doll. Rounding out the all-star cast are Kate McKinnon, Hari Nef, Dua Lipa and Emma Mackey as Barbie, Barbie, Barbie and Barbie.



ART

A PUNK FASHION ICON'S ARTISTIC LEGACY

ALEXANDER McQUEEN: ART MEETS FASHION

Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec,
Quebec City

Until September 10

THE CAPTIVATING BUT TROUBLED British designer Alexander McQueen was known for his punk disruption of high fashion. In this new exhibit, 69 of his theatrical creations are paired with similar artistic works. A jewel-toned snakeskin dress, for example, is matched with an ornate urn with a carved lizard by Portuguese artist Manuel Cipriano Gomes Mafra, while a flamenco-inspired dress with a horned headpiece pairs up with a portrait of a dancing woman by Canadian painter Clarence Gagnon. All of it serves to highlight how fashion influences art, and vice versa. Although McQueen once said, "I never look at other people's work," a stroll through this exhibition shows how the rebellious designer was touched by art all around him—whether he realized it or not.

Barbie by CP Images, McQueen by Museum Associates/LACMA and Guy Couture

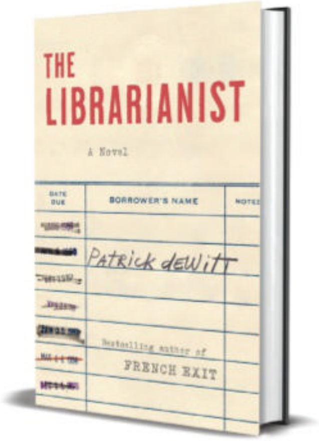
BOOKS

A QUIETLY POWERFUL MUST-READ

THE LIBRARIANIST

Patrick deWitt

July 4



NOVELIST PATRICK DEWITT reinvents himself with every book: he's done a western, a gothic and now, in his fifth novel, a quiet character study. His protagonist is literature lover Bob Comet, a seemingly ordinary retired librarian volunteering at a senior centre, tasked mostly with mingling with residents ("like a cocktail party but no cocktails"). Through his chats with the eclectic characters around him, Bob's boring life is slowly revealed to be just as interesting, complicated, nuanced and poetic as the literature he loves most of all.

MUSIC

AN IRREVERENT CLASSICAL MUSIC FESTIVAL

TORONTO SUMMER MUSIC FESTIVAL

Various locations

July 5 to 29

THIS JOYFUL FEST OFFERS 24 packed days of performances from classical artists interpreting this year's theme: metamorphosis. Headliners include soprano superstar Sondra Radvanovsky and pianist Angela Hewitt. The fabulously nebulous theme also makes room for any number of surprises, like Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* reimagined by Canadian Teiya Kasahara, a queer, non-binary singer. They challenge everything you think you know about opera in their performance, which focuses on the Japanese melodies Puccini borrowed. PointeTango Dance Company, meanwhile, merges classical ballet with Argentine tango for what might be the sexiest show you'll ever see on pointe.

ART

AN ARTIST'S FAMILY TREE

THE BLACK CANADIANS (AFTER COOKE)

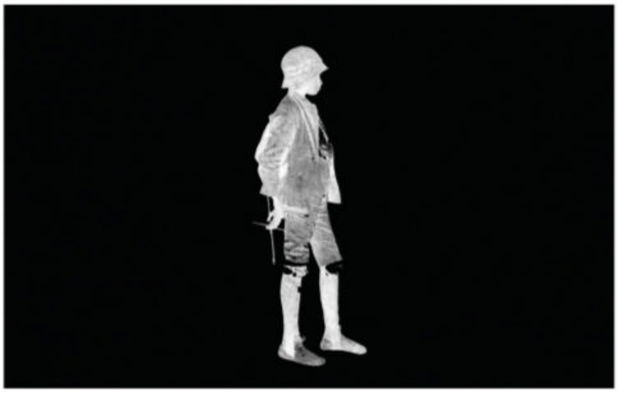
Deanna Bowen

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Opens mid-July

IN 17 PANELS PROJECTED onto the National Gallery's facade, Deanna Bowen's exhibit charts five generations of her family, including her great-grandfather's flight from racial violence in Oklahoma and migration to Canada. Through the lens of her own family tree, Bowen explores the Black experience in Canada within a broader global context of social change, including the U.K.'s abolition of slavery in 1833 and the lingering legacy of colonialism. (Cooke, if you're wondering, is journalist Britton B. Cooke; his 1911 article "The Black Canadian" argued against Black immigration in Canada in the pages of *Maclean's*.)

—Rosemary Counter



Radvanovsky by Andrew Eccles; The Black Canadians (After Cooke) courtesy of the artist and MKG127

“I had no opportunities at home in Japan. My world opened up when I got to Canada.”

I didn’t realize it was possible to raise a family and have a thriving career

By Yuka Yamada

WHEN I WAS A KID IN JAPAN IN THE EARLY ’90S, my kindergarten teacher asked my class what we wanted to be when we grew up. I told her that I wanted to be a bride. I don’t remember what the other girls said, but I can guarantee that none of the five-year-old boys proclaimed their dreams of becoming a groom. In my country, there’s a strong emphasis on maintaining what we call “social harmony”: you’re expected to be agreeable and never express a dissenting opinion. These norms are especially pronounced for women and girls, who are usually meant to be quiet caretakers, often responsible for domestic tasks.

I grew up with two brothers in a suburb outside Tokyo. My mom worked part time while we were young so she could take care of us. She often asked me to help cook and clean, but my brothers weren’t expected to lift a finger. My dad, an engineer, was strict and rarely home: he left for work around 6 a.m. and rarely returned before 10 p.m.

I came to Canada for the first time when I was 15, staying with a host family for two weeks as part of my school’s international program. I immersed myself in the language and culture, discovering a society where it was acceptable to voice opinions. I became obsessed with learning English so I could return someday.

By the time I reached my early 20s, I was eager to see what opportunities a new country could offer. In 2008, I was studying for an English communications bachelor’s degree and enrolled in an eight-month exchange program with a Canadian university. In my classes here, I was shocked to learn that professors encouraged discussion and debate, even among female students. For the first time in my life, my opinions were valued, and people treated me as an equal.

I never once felt celebrated as a woman in Japan. I’m raising my daughter to know a different way of life.

I returned to Japan a year later to finish my final semester of university. One day, I was on the train when I saw a man groping a woman’s breasts while she was asleep. This often happens on crowded trains, but women don’t speak up out of fear and social pressure to stay silent. I wanted to say something but couldn’t find the words. So instead I pulled out my phone and took a picture with the shutter on loud so the man would know he was being watched. When the woman woke up, I showed her the photos. She was horrified, but decided not to press charges. I realized then how hard it was to speak up for yourself as a woman in Japanese society. If I stayed, I would be forever confined to these gender norms.

I wanted to build a career and a family after I graduated, but I knew I couldn’t have both in Japan. Women occupy less than 15 per cent of senior management roles, and the current Japanese government only has two female ministers. People work until 10 or 11 p.m.—an impossible schedule for mothers. Many of my female childhood friends left their careers as soon as they had children. They didn’t have a choice: childcare and household responsibilities are still seen as women’s tasks, and if you take sick days or leave work early to pick up your child, you’re written off as unambitious and passed up for promotions. I didn’t realize until I spent time in Canada that it was possible to be a strong-willed woman with a thriving career. Living here, I saw female politicians, women in management positions and successful working moms wherever I turned.

In 2010, I moved to Sault Ste. Marie to complete a second bachelor’s degree at Algoma University. I became a permanent resident six years later, and I now manage a team of student advisers at Algoma’s Brampton campus. In 2018, I married my husband, Vinay; we have two kids. In my current role, I’m often able to finish work at 4:30 p.m., and I never have to worry that I’ll be punished for prioritizing my family.

In March, I was a panellist for an International Women’s Day event when somebody asked how our cultures celebrated women. I didn’t have an answer. Japan is progressive in many ways, and I take pride in my culture, but we’re behind when it comes to gender equality. I never once felt celebrated as a woman there. I’m raising my daughter to know a different way of life. She can be whatever she sets her mind to—a beautiful bride, if that’s what she chooses, and so much more. ■

—As told to Mira Miller

ILLUSTRATION BY **VICTOR KERLOW**

always
discreet
100% PROTECTION
RapidDry CORE
6 Extra Heavy
For bladder leaks
Très abondant
33 PADS SERVIETTES

“it is so comfortable and it feels like it’s barely there”

-Kate

6 drop regular pads. 3.5 oz of liquid.

always discreet

This is the bladder leak protection we deserve

©2022 P&G

LEXUS
EXPERIENCE AMAZING

AS
ELECTRIC
AS YOU

INSPIRED BY, CREATED FOR,
AND POWERED BY YOU.

There is so much about you that amazes us. Your passion, your drive, and most of all, your energy. Truthfully, it's inspiring. Which is why we crafted a range of electrified vehicles engineered to keep up with everything you are and all that you do. Be it with our Self-Charging Hybrids, Plug-in Hybrid Electric, or even our first-ever Battery Electric, this is where your electricity meets its match.

This is Lexus. Electrified.

LEXUS RX
LEXUS NX
LEXUS RZ